

## Language Problem in African Dramatic Literature: An Examination of Ola Rotimi's Dramatic Experiment

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### Abstract

This paper explores the enduring problem of language in African literature, with a particular focus on African dramatic texts and Ola Rotimi's innovative response through multilingual dramaturgy. Situated within the frameworks of decolonisation theory and postcolonial literary criticism, the study interrogates the ideological and practical challenges African writers face in selecting a language of literary expression. The central question — *What should be the language of African literature?* — continues to provoke spirited debate, shaped by colonial histories, linguistic diversity, cultural identity, and audience accessibility. The paper identifies and critically engages with four major schools of thought on the issue: the linguistic purists who advocate for indigenous African languages; the foreign language realists who prioritize global intelligibility through colonial languages; the proponents of Pidgin English as a bridge between oral and literary traditions; and, finally, the multilingualists exemplified by Ola Rotimi, who seeks a reconciliatory path. Using close readings of *If...: A Tragedy of the Ruled* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*, the paper examines how Rotimi strategically assigns different language registers — indigenous languages, Pidgin English, and Standard British English — to characters based on their social status, ethnicity, and communicative roles. Rotimi's method does not merely reflect Nigeria's linguistic plurality; it actively constructs a theatre of inclusivity and realism, one that foregrounds language as both a performative and political tool. Moreover, his technique of multilingual layering, supported by in-text interpreters and strategic translation, illustrates how African literature can maintain cultural authenticity while achieving global intelligibility. In conclusion, the study advocates for multilingualism not merely as an artistic device but as a sustainable linguistic philosophy for African literature. It underscores the importance of writer intentionality, audience scope, and translation in resolving the language dilemma in African literary expression.

**Keywords:** Multilingualism, African Dramatic Literature, Ola Rotimi, Postcolonial Language Politics

## Introduction

The language question in African literature remains one of the most enduring and complex issues in postcolonial literary discourse. Since the advent of written African literature in the colonial and post-independence eras, African writers and scholars have grappled with the dilemma of linguistic choice: Should African literature be written in indigenous African languages, in the colonial languages inherited from European powers (such as English, French, or Portuguese), or in hybrid forms like Pidgin English? This debate cuts to the heart of broader concerns about cultural authenticity, audience accessibility, identity formation, and decolonial resistance. The issue becomes even more pressing in the context of dramatic literature, where language functions not only as a textual medium but as a performative and visual element. In theatre, language is embodied – spoken, heard, gestured, and interpreted in real time. It thus plays a central role in characterisation, mood, realism, and audience engagement. Dramatic texts, therefore, offer a particularly fertile ground for examining how linguistic strategies reflect or resist postcolonial conditions.

As Daramola (2012) notes, the language problem has long outlived the colonial era, persisting into the postcolonial and even contemporary African literary landscape. Igboanusi (2001) similarly argues that the linguistic challenges facing African writers today stem from both historical legacies and present-day multilingual realities. The central question remains: *What language best serves the goals of African literature?* Is it more important for literature to preserve indigenous cultural forms or to achieve international legibility? These questions are not purely academic. They have real implications for readership, representation, and power. Language determines who is included or excluded from the narrative, what cultural values are expressed, and how texts circulate globally. Language, in African literary discourse, is a battleground of memory and modernity, resistance and adaptation.

The debate has given rise to several schools of thought: linguistic purists who advocate for writing in African languages as an act of cultural preservation and resistance; realists who view colonial languages as pragmatic tools for broader communication; advocates of Pidgin English who see it as a middle-ground, grassroots medium; and, more recently, proponents of multilingualism who argue for a hybridised, plural approach. These differing views reflect deeper tensions in African societies between nationhood and ethnicity, tradition and modernity, localism and globalism. This paper engages this ongoing debate by focusing on one of Africa's most linguistically inventive playwrights – Ola Rotimi. Through an analysis of his plays *If...: A Tragedy of the Ruled* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*, the study explores how Rotimi responds to the language crisis not by choosing one language over another, but by integrating multiple languages into his dramatic works. His use of multilingualism – blending indigenous languages, Pidgin English, and Standard British English – offers a nuanced, performative strategy that mirrors Nigeria's linguistic diversity and fosters cultural inclusivity.

The central argument advanced here is that Rotimi's multilingual dramaturgy provides a reconciliatory model for African literature, particularly dramatic texts, by bridging the gap between linguistic authenticity and audience accessibility. Through multilingual layering and the inclusion of translation techniques within the performance itself, Rotimi not only resists linguistic imperialism but also enhances dramatic realism and engagement. In examining Rotimi's linguistic experiments, this paper situates itself within the broader field of postcolonial literary theory and decolonisation studies, proposing multilingualism not just as a stylistic device but as a critical strategy for African literature moving forward.

## Theoretical Framework: Language and Postcolonial Identity

Language, in the context of African literature, is not merely a tool for artistic expression – it is a site of ideological contestation, historical trauma, and cultural reconstitution. The choice of language by African writers is inherently political and symbolic. It is tied to legacies of colonialism, strategies of resistance, processes of identity formation, and visions of cultural emancipation. Postcolonial theory provides a rich framework for understanding this linguistic dilemma, especially in how it intersects with issues of power, representation, and

decolonisation. At the heart of postcolonial literary theory is the idea that colonialism did not simply impose political and economic domination; it restructured African worldviews through language and discourse. As Edward Said (1978) demonstrated in *Orientalism*, colonial narratives constructed knowledge systems that excluded or misrepresented colonised peoples. Language — the language of governance, religion, education, and literature — was central to this process. In the African context, English, French, and Portuguese displaced indigenous languages in official and literary spheres, leading to what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) calls the “cultural bomb”: the destruction of people’s belief in the efficacy and worth of their own language and worldview.

Ngũgĩ’s theory of linguistic decolonisation advocates a radical shift: African literature, he argues, must be written in African languages if it is to truly reflect African realities and resist epistemic colonialism. For him, African writers who use colonial languages, no matter how African their content, remain entangled in a neo-colonial structure of representation. This is why he famously transitioned from writing in English to Gikuyu, and why he maintains that language is a carrier of culture, not just a neutral medium. However, not all postcolonial theorists or writers adopt Ngũgĩ’s position wholesale. Critics like Chinua Achebe and Homi Bhabha offer more nuanced or pragmatic alternatives. Achebe views English as a “world language” that African writers can appropriate and indigenise, using it to express African realities in ways that both local and global audiences can understand. Bhabha’s concept of cultural hybridity further complicates binary oppositions between indigenous and colonial. He argues that postcolonial identities are constructed in the “third space” — a space of negotiation and transformation. In this view, language becomes a fluid terrain of translation, code-switching, and performative hybridity, rather than a fixed marker of authenticity or colonisation.

This theoretical background is particularly relevant to dramatic literature, where language operates across multiple levels: textual, performative, gestural, and sonic. Theatre, unlike prose fiction, must communicate instantly and viscerally with live audiences, who may come from varied linguistic backgrounds. This immediacy demands strategies that accommodate linguistic diversity without sacrificing artistic coherence. It is in this performative space that multilingualism emerges not just as a linguistic feature but as a decolonial aesthetic — a way of asserting cultural multiplicity, audience inclusivity, and dramatic realism. Ola Rotimi’s multilingual dramaturgy can thus be interpreted through this theoretical lens. His plays reflect the tensions between Ngũgĩ’s call for indigenous-language purity and Achebe’s realist embrace of colonial languages. However, Rotimi does not seek to resolve the tension by choosing one over the other; instead, he dramatizes it. His plays integrate indigenous languages, Pidgin English, and British English, distributing them strategically across characters of different backgrounds and statuses. This move aligns with Bhabha’s hybridity and Bakhtin’s polyphony, allowing for multiple voices and linguistic registers to coexist within a single performance. Ultimately, this paper adopts a theoretical perspective that understands language in African drama as a dynamic, contested, and performative force, shaped by historical conditions and ideological struggles. Multilingualism, in this framework, is not merely a stylistic device, but a postcolonial strategy of negotiation, survival, and cultural articulation.

### **Schools of Thought on Language in African Literature**

The language question in African literature has given rise to several critical schools of thought, each offering distinct ideological, cultural, and pragmatic responses to the challenges of postcolonial expression. These schools — Linguistic Purism, Foreign Language Realism, Pidgin Advocacy, and Multilingualism — reflect different visions of what African literature should do and who it should serve. Each is shaped by historical legacies, socio-political dynamics, cultural philosophy, and assumptions about readership and accessibility.

Linguistic purists argue that African literature should be written exclusively in indigenous African languages. This position is rooted in a strong decolonial ethos and finds its most articulate expression in the works of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Obi Wali, and Taban lo Liyong. For this school, language is not simply a communicative tool; it is a vessel of culture, identity, and

worldview. Writing in colonial languages is seen as perpetuating cultural dependency and epistemic domination. Ngũgĩ (1986) famously renounced English as a literary language, arguing that writing in Gikuyu was a political act of resistance and reclamation. He contends that African languages must be the foundation of African cultural development, and that translation – from indigenous to foreign languages – should follow, not precede, original composition. Drawing on examples from world literature, purists note that Shakespeare, Molière, Chekhov, and Brecht all wrote in their native tongues, only later being translated. For purists, African literature must begin with cultural self-affirmation, and this cannot occur without linguistic sovereignty. Indigenous languages are seen as the only authentic medium through which African realities, metaphors, and idioms can be fully and accurately conveyed.

In contrast, foreign language realists argue that African literature should utilise the colonial languages – especially English and French – for the sake of national unity, global intelligibility, and wider dissemination. This perspective, associated with writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Dapo Adelugba, maintains that language is a means to an end, not a cultural battleground. Achebe (1965) famously declared that English could be made “bear the weight” of African experience, provided it is adapted and indigenised. For him, what matters most is the story, the cultural vision, and the moral force behind the narrative – not necessarily the linguistic code in which it is told. In multiethnic nations like Nigeria, where hundreds of languages coexist, a common medium like English is often the only feasible way to communicate across ethnic lines and reach both national and international audiences. This school also emphasizes that African writers can subvert and domesticate colonial languages, infusing them with African idioms, proverbs, syntax, and worldview. Thus, realism here does not equate to cultural betrayal but to strategic engagement with global readership and postcolonial identity politics.

Although a minority voice in scholarly discourse, the Pidgin English school champions the use of Pidgin – a hybrid, urban variety of English commonly spoken across West Africa – as a literary language. Advocates argue that Pidgin captures the cadence, humour, irony, and rhythm of everyday African life, especially among working-class and semi-literate populations. Pidgin is positioned as a grassroots medium that can democratise literature, bridging the gap between educated elites and marginalised communities. It resonates with oral traditions and urban popular culture, offering a vibrant, evolving linguistic palette. Writers who explore this route see Pidgin as an authentic postcolonial expression, born from contact, struggle, and reinvention. However, critics contend that Pidgin lacks standardisation and literary prestige. Its regional variation and grammatical informality may limit its adaptability across African countries or for formal literary genres. Moreover, it may be perceived – especially in conservative academic circles – as a “corrupted” form of English rather than a distinct linguistic identity. Despite these critiques, the expressive power of Pidgin, particularly in theatre and performance poetry, continues to grow.

The multilingualist school, exemplified by playwright Ola Rotimi, proposes a synthesis of linguistic traditions. Rather than advocating for one dominant language, multilingualists construct literary works that weave together indigenous languages, Pidgin, and Standard English. This approach mirrors the linguistic fluidity of African societies, particularly in cities where multiple languages are spoken side-by-side. Multilingualism in African drama is not merely a stylistic choice but a political and performative act. It allows for layered characterisation, realistic dialogue, and the representation of diverse social classes and ethnic groups within a single narrative space. It also reflects the postcolonial condition – fractured yet interwoven, local yet globally conscious. Rotimi’s plays deploy language not as a static code, but as a dynamic cultural register. Characters speak in different tongues depending on context, status, and interpersonal dynamics. This polyglot structure fosters audience inclusivity, allowing multiple linguistic communities to see themselves represented. It also aligns with Bakhtinian polyphony, where no single voice dominates but a chorus of perspectives coexists. This reconciliatory model offers a practical solution to the language question. It neither fetishizes linguistic purity nor wholly submits to colonial hegemony. Instead, it embraces the hybridity, complexity, and adaptability of African identities and performance cultures.

## Ngũgĩ vs. Rotimi: Comparative Perspectives on Language and Decolonisation

Few African writers have engaged the language question as boldly and ideologically as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ola Rotimi, albeit through contrasting paradigms. While both seek to affirm African cultural identity and contest the residue of colonial domination, their strategies diverge significantly. Ngũgĩ's work is informed by a radical decolonisation agenda grounded in linguistic nationalism, whereas Rotimi adopts a performative pluralism that mirrors the sociolinguistic realities of Nigeria.

Ngũgĩ's position is uncompromising: language is the most powerful carrier of culture, and any literature that does not engage indigenous African languages risks perpetuating colonial hegemony. His transition from writing in English to writing exclusively in Gikuyu – as seen in works like *Caitani Mutharaba-Ini* (*Devil on the Cross*) and *Matigari* – was not simply aesthetic but profoundly political. In his seminal essay collection *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), Ngũgĩ argues that colonialism imposed a linguistic hierarchy that devalued African languages and constructed European languages as normative, intellectual, and civilised. For Ngũgĩ, true decolonisation must begin with the reclamation of African languages as legitimate vehicles of thought, education, and literature. Writing in English, no matter how African the content, is to remain intellectually enslaved. He insists that the translation of indigenous-language texts into European languages should be secondary and strategic – a means of exporting African thought, not importing Western norms. However, critics have questioned the practical feasibility of Ngũgĩ's purist model, particularly in nations like Nigeria, which house hundreds of mutually unintelligible languages. In such contexts, insisting on a single indigenous language risks marginalising vast populations, and may inadvertently replicate the linguistic exclusion that colonialism once enforced.

Rotimi's response to the language question is rooted not in rejection, but in reconciliation. His approach does not seek to replace one language with another, but to integrate multiple linguistic registers – English, indigenous languages, and Pidgin – within a single dramatic narrative. For Rotimi, multilingualism is not only a theatrical technique but also a philosophical statement about the coexistence of cultures and identities in postcolonial Africa. This is clearly demonstrated in plays such as *If...: A Tragedy of the Ruled* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*, where language serves as a marker of social class, ethnic identity, and communicative intent. Characters speak according to their background: the elite in Standard English, the working class in Pidgin, and traditional figures in local dialects. The inclusion of interpreters or translated stage directions – particularly in *Hopes of the Living Dead* – further underscores Rotimi's commitment to audience accessibility and dramatic authenticity. Rotimi's model embraces code-switching and linguistic fluidity as natural features of African urban life. Rather than viewing English as an imperial imposition, he "tempers its Englishness" by fusing it with African idioms, rhythm, and worldview. His plays do not erase colonial languages but rather domesticate and hybridise them to serve African expressive needs.

While Ngũgĩ and Rotimi differ in method, they share a common goal: the reclamation of African voice and identity in literature. Ngũgĩ envisions decolonisation as a linguistic purge – a return to the mother tongue as the only authentic medium of African expression. Rotimi, by contrast, imagines decolonisation as linguistic pluralism, a creative embrace of the continent's heteroglossia. The difference between the two can also be linked to genre. Ngũgĩ works primarily in prose and essays, where the written word dominates and translation often occurs after the fact. Rotimi writes for the stage, where language must function live, aurally, and instantaneously. His multilingualism reflects not only Nigeria's sociolinguistic reality but the immediate needs of performance – where characters must be understood, emotions conveyed, and conflict dramatised across linguistic boundaries. In effect, Ngũgĩ's model is ideologically rigorous but structurally restrictive, while Rotimi's model is aesthetically dynamic and audience-conscious. Each responds to the language crisis in ways appropriate to their medium, audience, and national context. Together, they enrich the conversation about language in African literature, offering contrasting yet complementary visions of postcolonial literary sovereignty.

## Rotimi's Multilingual Technique: Close Textual Analysis

Ola Rotimi's multilingual approach is not a superficial stylistic embellishment; it is an integral part of his dramaturgy and ideological commitment to cultural inclusivity, audience accessibility, and socio-political realism. In his plays, language becomes a dramatic tool that communicates not only character identity but also power relations, cultural hybridity, and national complexity. This section offers a close textual reading of two of Rotimi's most linguistically innovative works — *If...: A Tragedy of the Ruled* and *Hopes of the Living Dead* — in order to demonstrate how his use of multilingualism functions at narrative, characterological, and performative levels.

In *If...*, Rotimi introduces a linguistic architecture that mirrors the socio-economic stratification of Nigerian society. The play assigns different languages to characters based on their class status, education level, and ethno-regional background. Standard British English is spoken by elites and government officials, Pidgin English is used by the working class, and indigenous languages appear in emotionally charged or culturally specific contexts. This approach is consistent with what Bakhtin (1981) describes as heteroglossia — the simultaneous presence of multiple speech types and ideologies within a single text. A notable example is the character 'Woman 1', who switches fluidly between Pidgin English and Ibibio depending on who she is addressing:

Woman 1: Garuba want watah? (Gestures overtly to Garuba as she speaks) Wait small ... watch come....hear? (Calling) Ukot! Ukot!

Ukot: (a little boy pops out of a room) Ma!

Woman 1: (addresses boy roughly in Ibibio) *Afo anam nso ken do? Sob idem ben mon uye idem oro sok Garuba. Ma 'sime ntu'uso!*  
(English: *What are you doing in there! Come on, fetch water for Garuba! Useless like your father!*)

Here, the multilingual interaction does several things at once. It localises the play in a culturally familiar Nigerian setting; it distinguishes social relationships (she uses English-based Pidgin with a peer and native language with her child); and it immerses the audience in a linguistic environment that reflects daily life. However, the translation of indigenous language occurs only in stage directions, limiting real-time understanding for theatre audiences unfamiliar with Ibibio — a shortcoming that Rotimi corrects in his later work.

In *Hopes of the Living Dead*, Rotimi expands and refines his multilingual strategy by introducing the interpreter technique — a performative mechanism that ensures comprehension across language boundaries in a live setting. The play features characters from diverse Nigerian ethnicities who speak in their respective languages, but interpreters embedded in the play translate dialogue for the audience and other characters. This transforms translation from a silent textual note to a visible, interactive act on stage. A powerful illustration occurs in the opening scene:

Hannah (in Kalabari): *Mi bobiri be ye fate?* (Is that all for this evening?)

HW (also in Kalabari): *Ibite mingba ba lasaki.* (That'll be all. We may continue tomorrow.)

Court Clerk: What did he say?

Hannah: Says that's all for this evening.

Later, when Harcourt White addresses a multilingual group of patients:

HW: "We want volunteers." (*Interpreters whisper the announcement round simultaneously, in various languages.*)

This moment transcends simple translation. It dramatizes the process of multilingual negotiation and creates a space of inclusive communication, reflecting Nigeria's reality while maintaining clarity for the audience. It also aligns with Rotimi's own production note, where he encourages directors to adapt language choices to the linguistic composition of the cast and performance locale. The play thus becomes a flexible, living text capable of cross-cultural performance.

Rotimi's multilingualism is also a tool for social realism. Characters do not speak languages arbitrarily; their speech reflects their education, ethnicity, occupation, and ideological stance. For example, religious figures may speak Yoruba proverbs, colonial bureaucrats use formal English, and grassroots characters express themselves in Pidgin – each language choice anchored in realism. Moreover, language in Rotimi's theatre becomes a device for conflict and cohesion. Linguistic diversity can symbolize division (as seen in miscommunications or suspicion between ethnic groups), but it also allows for coalition building and shared resistance, especially when interpreters or multilingual characters bridge the divide. From a performative standpoint, Rotimi's multilingual structure adds rhythmic and tonal variety, enriching the sonic landscape of the stage. The alternation of languages creates dramatic texture, musicality, and shifts in audience engagement, depending on which linguistic code is in use. This layering of languages not only mirrors national complexity but reinforces Rotimi's belief that theatre must reflect the pluralistic soul of African society.

### Translation and Performance Reception

Translation is more than a technical supplement in Ola Rotimi's multilingual dramaturgy; it is an essential mechanism through which his plays achieve audience inclusivity, narrative coherence, and cultural resonance. While translation has always been central to African literature due to its multilingual contexts, Rotimi's innovation lies in how he incorporates translation into the performance itself, rather than treating it as a post-production necessity or textual afterthought. This section explores the relationship between translation and performance in Rotimi's plays, with a focus on how his technique addresses the challenges of live theatre in a linguistically diverse society.

In *If...: A Tragedy of the Ruled*, Rotimi provides translations of indigenous languages in the stage directions or parentheses, aimed primarily at the reading audience. While this approach ensures clarity for the reader, it falls short in live theatre, where such glosses are inaccessible to viewers. In performance, these untranslated segments risk excluding audience members who do not understand the language spoken on stage – creating what Walter Benjamin (1923) called the “linguistic abyss” between message and receiver. Recognising this limitation, Rotimi evolves his technique in *Hopes of the Living Dead* by introducing in-play translation, whereby characters function as interpreters for one another and for the audience. This aligns with Patrice Pavis's theory of the *intercultural stage*, where translation becomes part of the visual and auditory dramaturgy, not simply an invisible textual device. For example, when Harcourt White gives a command in Kalabari, Hannah immediately interprets it for the Court Clerk. Later, announcements are relayed across different linguistic communities by chorus members who simultaneously whisper the content in Yoruba, Igbo, and Pidgin. This real-time translation bridges the comprehension gap and turns the act of translation into a dramatic moment in itself.

In Rotimi's work, translation functions beyond utility. It becomes a dramaturgical device that advances plot, develops character, and highlights power dynamics. The interpreter role, often played by a minor character like Hannah, reflects how underrepresented or marginalised figures can become central agents of understanding and unity. By foregrounding these acts of interpretation, Rotimi not only makes language accessible but also foregrounds the social labor involved in cross-cultural communication. This device also introduces an element of meta-theatre. The audience becomes aware of the mechanics of understanding – the fact that meaning is always mediated, refracted through someone else's voice. Such awareness enhances dramatic tension and thematic depth, particularly in a play like *Hopes of the Living Dead*, where miscommunication, misrepresentation, and the struggle to be heard are central concerns.

One of the greatest challenges in multilingual performance is ensuring that linguistic diversity enhances rather than alienates. Rotimi's interpreter-based system, combined with code-switching and multilingual cues, creates a theatre that is polyphonic yet accessible. This aligns with the principles of Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, where language is not a barrier but a bridge between audience and performer, elite and marginalised, dominant and indigenous. Moreover, Rotimi's multilingualism reflects the lived realities of Nigerian audiences, especially in urban centres like Lagos or Port Harcourt, where people routinely shift between Standard English, Pidgin, and local languages in a single conversation. This linguistic authenticity deepens audience identification and immersion. It also allows for multiple levels of engagement: indigenous language speakers may respond with cultural recognition; English speakers grasp the narrative through translation; Pidgin speakers find voice and relatability.

Finally, translation in Rotimi's plays is not politically neutral. It draws attention to who has the authority to interpret — whose voice carries, and whose is mediated. In *Hopes of the Living Dead*, Harcourt White's multilingual control and his reliance on interpreters subtly reflect the postcolonial tension between command and comprehension, between central authority and grassroots reception. In this way, translation becomes a mirror of national governance and cultural pluralism. It reinforces the notion that no single language can serve as a national absolute, and that coexistence depends on constant negotiation — a central theme of Rotimi's dramatic vision.

### **Conclusion: Toward a Reconciliatory Framework**

The language question in African literature is far from resolved, and perhaps it should not be. Its persistence signals the dynamic tension at the heart of postcolonial creativity: the pull between indigenous authenticity and global intelligibility, between linguistic loyalty and pragmatic outreach. Rather than treating this tension as a problem to be eradicated, Ola Rotimi embraces it as a space of artistic possibility — a space where complexity can be dramatized rather than simplified. This study has examined how Rotimi's multilingual dramaturgy provides a reconciliatory framework for negotiating Africa's language dilemma. His plays do not seek to crown a single language as dominant. Instead, they present a theatre in which English, Pidgin, and indigenous languages coexist, conflict, and collaborate — much like the society they reflect. Through close analysis of *If...* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*, we have seen how Rotimi uses language to delineate character, navigate social strata, and construct a linguistically inclusive narrative space. Importantly, Rotimi's approach offers a performative resolution to debates that often remain theoretical. By embedding translation directly into the action and allowing characters to function as interpreters, he transforms multilingualism from a textual challenge into a dramatic resource. This technique ensures that theatre remains accessible without compromising linguistic authenticity. It also mirrors the real-world practices of communication in multilingual societies, where understanding is achieved through negotiation, repetition, and code-switching.

Furthermore, the study underscores that linguistic intentionality should guide African writers — not rigid allegiance to ideology. Writers should select languages based on their communicative goals, cultural affiliations, and intended audience. Whether the aim is to affirm indigenous identity, engage with global readership, or speak to the linguistic diversity of local communities, the chosen medium should serve the message, not constrain it. The practical role of translation in this framework cannot be overstated. Despite its imperfection and the inevitable loss of nuance, translation remains a vital tool for making African literature mobile, plural, and relevant across cultural contexts. Whether through formal literary translation or live interpretive performance, it enables African voices to travel without being diluted. Ola Rotimi's multilingualism thus emerges not only as an artistic method but as a literary philosophy — one that acknowledges the fractured yet fertile linguistic landscape of postcolonial Africa. His model is especially relevant for contemporary African theatre-makers and educators, who must prepare texts for audiences that are increasingly cross-cultural, cross-lingual, and diasporic. In the end, Rotimi's vision challenges us to reconsider the question: *What should be the language of African literature?* His answer, though not prescriptive, is clear — the language of African literature should be as plural as Africa itself. It should be



adaptable, layered, inclusive, and, above all, capable of carrying the weight of African realities and aspirations in all their complexity.

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