

**TRANSLATING THE LINGUISTIC
INNOVATION OF FRENCH IN *LE
TUMULTE D'ITIA-AFE-EKPE* OF INEGBE**

BY

Ndifon Mamina Mba, PhD
University of Calabar, Nigeria
maminandifon@unical.edu.ng

Edeghe-Udim, Stella
Ritman University, Nigeria
edestella@gmail.com

Ndip Frida Egbe
Modern Languages & Translation Studies
University of Calabar Cross River State Nigeria
ndifrida123@gmail.com +2347018419640

Abstract

This study translates the linguistic innovation of French in *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe* and how the narrative relates language, culture, and identity. Inegbe's novel, *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe*, constitutes a rich terrain for analyzing linguistic innovation due to its unique language and immersive narrative style. This novel explores the

challenges posed by spiritual warfare against an evil goddess, exile, and suffering, while integrating innovative linguistic elements. This study adopts stylistic and sociolinguistic approaches as tools of analysis that consider language productions as conditioned by specific social parameters. This study places particular emphasis on linguistic choices, stylistic figures, and narrative tones. The study highlights how Inegbe uses language hybridization, blending French with Anaang (African) idioms and proverbs, to create a linguistic space that reflects the complex identity of his characters. This innovation is also evident in dialogue construction, mirroring the sociocultural reality of contemporary Africa. Using an intertextual approach and playing on linguistic codes, the author offers an authentic and engaging voice that resonates with the dilemmas and hopes of evolving African societies.

Keywords: French, Linguistic Innovation, *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe*, Stylistic, Translating

Introduction

Translating Inegbe's literary work is not merely a linguistic exercise but a profound cultural and political challenge, requiring the translator to confront the very essence of her literary subversion. Linguistic innovation in African literature written in French refers to the creative use or integration of African languages to reflect the cultural, social, and historical realities of Africa. The Nigerian novel, *Le*

Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe, is full of linguistic innovation. The novelist innovation is characterized by transposition of Nigerian (Anaang) syntax, cadence, and worldview onto the French framework. This allows for Nigerian cultures to be highlighted and their richness and diversity to be shown. Nigeria is "one of the major African countries endowed with multiple cultures and indigenous languages. It is divided into geo-political zones, states, and ethnic groups, including the Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Efik, Ibibio, Fulani, Bini, Annang, and Ijaw. "Members of these groups communicate among themselves using their indigenous languages" (Inegbe, 2014, p. 219). However, the official language of communication in Nigeria, despite ethnic affiliations, is English, the language of the colonizer. Nigerians, aside their different indigenous languages, also use English and French to communicate with each other. According to Udousoro (2002, p.68), "French was adopted by the Nigerian federal government in 1996". This indicates that English and French are official languages in Nigeria. Thus, making French an essential language since the country is surrounded mainly by French-speaking African countries like: "le Niger au nord, le Cameroun et le Tchad à l'est, et la République du Bénin à l'ouest" (Inegbe, 2020, p.171). Nigeria is situated in Western part of Africa. Africa is divided into several sub-regions, including North Africa, Equatorial French Africa, West Africa, and East Africa. Africa has a rich literature, much of which is written in English

and French. Many Nigerian writers manipulate English or French and Western writing styles to express Nigerian culture. Writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, Tunde Ajiboye, Tunde Fatunde, Sanusi Ramonu, and Miriam Inegbe have developed their unique styles, drawing from their roots and local idioms. These writers use cultural elements to express sensitive ideas or problems, emphasizing Africanity.” Experimenting with language, these Nigerian writers contribute to renewing the forms and themes of Nigerian and African literature. Today in Nigeria, the spoken English or French is distinct, with Nigerian English or French containing "... many Africanisms" (Inegbe, 2013, p. 276) and "... exhibiting frequent phenomena in standard language” (Kwofie, 1984, p. 6). Researchers like Motazé (1997, p. 32) have emphasized that "... local languages have influenced the use of French, making it difficult to decode”. All these indicate that local languages have influenced the use of written and spoken French in Africa. This also indicate that so many factors have given birth to African French, characterized by "... the infiltration of dialectal words, regional accents, word creation, deformation of French words, and the educational level of African Francophones” (Inegbe, 2013, p. 277). These citations reveal that Africans have unique cultural and linguistic characteristics. This study will translate the linguistic innovation of French in *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe* by Inegbe to understand

how it contributes to the construction of meaning and the social impact of the work.

Methodological Approach

This study will focus on the linguistic innovation of French in *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe*.

This research adopts the linguistic stylistic concept. This analytical model will enable us to classify the stylistic figures used in the text. Short (1969, p. 13) defines style as "... the exhaustive study of language use in a work." Halliday (1960, p. 40) maintains that stylistics "... allows linguists to analyze texts where language is highlighted to create what culture classifies as art." Inegbe (2014, p. 222) affirms this, stating that "... a writer can choose words and language from their social background and class". Another possible linguistic approach for this study is sociolinguistics. It attempts to establish a relationship between an individual's social affiliation and their language usage. Sociolinguistics interacts with the sociology of language, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of society through its language. Sociolinguistics and sociology of language fall under socio-differential linguistics. This approach is also applied in anthropology, communication, and psychology. Sociolinguistic theory was primarily founded by William Labov, Dell Hymes, and Erving Goffman. This study will also employ sociolinguistics, particularly the theory of linguistic heterogeneity, to examine how the writer plays with the French

language to make it coexist with Nigerian dialects and idioms. Through analysis, this research will utilize sociolinguistic theory and linguistic stylistic concepts to examine the French language in the novel. This will help understand how Inegbe's stylistic choices reflect the sociocultural realities of her time.

A Brief Summary of the Novel *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe*

Miriam Stephen Inegbe's novel, *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe*, published in 2023, is a Nigerian author's exposition and blend of African reality in a fictional work. The narrative spans eleven chapters and 215 pages. This fictional work provides insight into African society, recounting experiences and conditions in the fictional town of Itia-Afe-Ekpe. It contains historical and cultural facts specific to the Anaang people in Nigeria. According to the author, incorporating dialectal traits and expressions aims "... to avoid ethnographic recriminations" (Inegbe, 2014, p. 222). The story navigates difficult trials and witnesses the horrors of spiritual warfare. In *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe*, the author primarily employs French as the writing language. Despite French being the main language, Inegbe integrates various elements of Nigerian local languages through specific words and expressions. These linguistic elements add authenticity and cultural depth to the narrative, immersing readers in the African universe. The Nigerian author seeks to break free from French language dominance and

reclaim it to express their identity. This hybrid linguistic approach creates a rich, immersive atmosphere, highlighting Nigeria's and Africa's linguistic and cultural diversity. Language usage reinforces the novel's authenticity and relevance, offering readers valuable insights into the region's social and traditional reality. The author's specific lexical choices highlight themes such as spiritual warfare against an evil goddess, identity, survival, traditional customs, reincarnation, exile, suffering, women's portraits, Itia-Afe-Ekpe's ancestors, ghostly lamentations, rituals, and violence in Nigeria, and in Africa generally. These lexical choices are crucial for emphasizing the novel's central themes and giving voice to characters struggling for survival in a war-torn environment. They contribute to the work's richness and ability to prompt reflection on complex African societal realities. Other notable works by the author include: *Une Récolte de Confinement* (2018), *Esemsem*, *Filsd'Eaux* (2020), *Green Flames* (2022), and others.

Linguistic Innovation of French in *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe*

Inegbe's blend, a *code métisse* or hybrid language, serves to "decolonize" the language of the colonizer, making a vessel for African reality. She achieves this through several key strategies:

- Syntactic and grammatical transgression:
Inegbe adopts sentence and grammatical forms

that are natural to Anaang but jarring or incorrect in standard French. This disruption is a powerful weapon against linguistic imperialism, thus, making the language sound African, restoring the orality and rhythmic flow of the traditional storyteller.

- Lexical appropriation: She boldly incorporates Anaang words and idioms into her French, sometimes leaving them untranslated (like traditional titles and some cultural items) and often translating them literally into French, resulting in startling phrases that carry Nigerian weight.
- Proverbial and cultural density: Her prose is saturated with Anaang proverbs and cultural allusions, functioning not as mere ornament but as integral tools for characterization and narrative development, grounding the text deeply in its indigenous context.

However, language plays a central role in the novel, *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe*, oscillating between academic French and local influences, creating a linguistic polychromy that echoes Nigeria's and Africa's cultural diversity. According to Saussure (1972, p.10), language is "... a product of society capable of expressing the thing or notion existing in the society that shaped it." Another researcher notes that language is "an indicator of an era, dreams, and a people's condition" (Inegbe, 2024, p.223). This means language reflects a culture, traditions, situations, and realities experienced by its speakers

in a particular era. The novel, *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe* features linguistic realism resulting from adapting Anaang language:

Ceciest la viande pour les esprits et les êtreshumains, acceptez-là de la main de votrepêtresses'ilvousplaît (32).

Lumière d'Itia-Afe-Ekpe s'éteignit hors de saterre! Notre roi, AbongIdung-Afaestparti! Il s'estinscrit aux ancêtres (39).

Je suis mort douloureusement, devrais-je continuer à mourir de faim ... (115)

Our Translation:

"This is the meat for spirits and humans; accept it from your priestess's hand, please" (32).

"Itia-Afe-Ekpe's light has gone out of its land! Our king, AbongIdung-Afa, has passed on! He has joined the ancestors" (39).

"I died painfully, should I continue to die of hunger..." (115)

These expressions are rich in meaning and demonstrate French's creativity and diversity. This creates a polyphonic effect and gives an authentic voice to characters. These simple phrases evoke profound, universal concepts: spirituality, death, suffering, power, and community, reflecting Anaang cultural richness and worldview. The phrase "I died painfully, should I continue to die of

hunger" (115) is metaphorical. The utterances of Asi, the crying ghost here symbolizes deep suffering, desperation, or failure. Inegbe (2022, p. 93) calls these creative expressions "borrowing from African socio-cultural environments which are incorporated into literary texts." Poetic and emotional registers are prominent in the novel, *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe* (2023):

Je suis né pour voir mon père faire cela... (123)

Meslarmescoulent jour et nuit (138)

Regardez-moi, mourir. Regardez-moi, aller à la tombe(138).

Je ne vais pas mourir pour rien(142).

Laisse-moi faire ce que j'allois faire... (144)

Elle nous a laissé à main levée (150)

Mon âme n'est plus... (184)

Our Translations:

"I was born to see my father do this..." (123)

"My tears flow day and night" (138)

"Watch me die. Watch me go to the grave" (138)

"I won't die for nothing" (142)

"Let me do what I must..." (144)

"She left us helpless" (150)

"My soul is no more..." (184)

These expressions are familiar, imaginative, and colorful, frequently used in Nigerian or African French to intensely express emotions. The phrase "meslarmescoulent jour et nuit" (138) is poetic, conveying profound sadness and suffering. It emphasizes the duration and intensity of pain. The extract "Regardez-moi, mourir. Regardez-moi, aller à la tombe" (138) is dramatic, expressing deep despair, potentially used in contexts of resignation or protest.

"Je ne vais pas mourir pour rien" (142) expresses the desire to give life meaning and leave a legacy, possibly related to struggles for justice or a greater cause. "Laisse-moi faire ce que j'allois faire" (144) shows determination despite obstacles. "Mon âme n'ère plus" (184) is poetic, touching on spiritual themes. The use of "ère" is uncommon in standard French, indicating a specific cultural or regional linguistic influence. All extracts are literal translations, which Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) describe as translating the source language word-for-word without changing word order or grammatical structures. In the novel, *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe*, Nigerian local languages significantly influence popular Nigerian French. Another type of borrowing is code-switching. Code-switching plays a crucial role in postcolonial literature, reflecting the complexity of colonized peoples' identities and cultural heritage. Postcolonial writers often combine languages and dialects to express experiences of colonization,

resistance, and identity quests. Inegbe adopts code-switching between French, English, and Anaang. She integrates French and Anaang codes, explaining their meanings within the narrative. Examples include:

- "Yak adentere!" (19), meaning "thus be it!"
- "Nne mmi eeei! Kop si tie!" (97), meaning "listen to them"
- "Ugwa idem ida" (108), meaning "my misfortune"
- "NungUkod E-come!" and "NungUkod E-see" (16)

Through language mixing, "... the writer subjugates African culture and society to the French language..." (Inegbe, 2022, p. 98). All dialectal expressions evoke cultural contexts in Anaang.

Symbolism is also present in the novel: "Un vent fort souleva le chien dans les airs et lançaversune destination inconnue" (112); "C'était un esprit du fantôme qui pleure à travers le village" (119). The "vent" (wind) symbolizes escape, desire for freedom, or uncontrollable forces. The "fantôme" (ghost) represents death, mortality, and potentially unresolved traumas or fears. The "vent" and "fantôme" are nuanced literary tools exploring human depths and creating specific atmospheres. The appearance of a ghostly spirit reflects Anaang cultural beliefs.

Vocative language and omnipresent female portraits are also evident in *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe* (2023):

"Notre mèreéternelle!

Mère de tous les êtreshumains!

Mère de tous les esprits!...

Notre reine et la déesse de la terre, Eka-Awasi"
(pp.72,73, 112)

This symbolizes divinity; representing an Anaang mythological goddess. Inegbe employs numerous Nigerian names: "Usiere, Asuabiat, Edeghe-Udim, Sutoidem, Mbukitiehe, Ndiok Ekarika, Akwa-Mbuk, etc." (pp. 7, 11, 16, 29, 33, 37, 131). These names symbolize Anaang society events and facts. People's names are "centrally important in their genealogy" and also "... a people's social, cultural, and mythological orientation is reflected in the names they bear" (Inegbe, 2021, p. 8). Anaang names are distinct from European names based on meaning.

The author of *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe* uses repetition, everyday vocabulary, and oral style. Examples from the text are:

- "Venezooo! Venezooo!" (5)
- "Pas encore! Pas encore!" (21)
- "Non! Non! Et non!" (56, 59)

- "Écoutez! Écoutez! Mon peuple, écoutez-moi"
(59)

- "Arrêtez! Arrêtez mesmères! Arrêtez!" (163)

Proverbial expressions are also abundant in the novel. Extracts from the novel are:

Il n'y a pas d'homme qui fait l'amour avec l'épouse d'un autre homme qui n'est pas prêt à mourir(37).

Quandune concubine sait comment prendre soin d'un homme, elle devient son épouse.(123)

Il n'y a aucun moment que les larmes peuvent devenir une rivière(129)

Ça sera possible quand la vache met au monde les veaux deux fois dans uneannée (129)

The first proverb, "Il n'y a pas d'homme qui fait l'amour avec l'épouse d'un autre homme qui n'est pas prêt à mourir", emphasizes the severe consequences of adultery, warning against physical and social risks. It reflects traditional values on marriage, adultery, and women's roles. Another proverb, "Quandune concubine sait comment prendre soin d'un homme, elledevient son épouse", highlights the importance of companionship and care in relationships. The proverb "Il n'ya aucun moment que les larmes peuvent devenir une rivière" suggests suffering is temporary.

The proverb "Ça sera possible quand la vache met au monde les veaux deux fois dans uneannée"

emphasizes impossibility. Proverbs effectively convey complex ideas and cultural values.

Inegbe uses figurative language to create vivid imagery and explore themes like joy, change, and loss: "J'aientendu un rire du joie par les valléesrieuses... Regarde-là, l'épaule de la collineportant les cadeaux pour le nouveau-né." (8-9); "La montagne est de venue vallée et la colline a quittésa place" (57); "Mon âme a disparu" (157). These extracts evoke intense joy, radical change, and deep despair.

Vituperative expressions also appear in the novel: "Tais-toi! Une prostituée!" (29);

- "Que mon sang soit sur l'esprit qui m'a fait cela..." (29). Neologisms characterize the French language in *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe*: "Non! pas mon premier sang..." (3), instead of "mon premier enfant"; "Notre roi, Abong Idung-Afaestparti! Il s'estinscrit aux ancêtres" (39), instead of "ilest mort!" ; "...mon premier sang qui n'est pas encore né" (121), instead of "mon premier enfant qui n'est pas encore né".

Graphological features include lexical usage with hyphens: "Affiong-etok" (4), "afia-ndom" (4), "Idim-Ibom" (6). Exclamation marks: "Non! Non! Non! Non! Je nelâcherai pas ceroyaume" (56). Nigerian terms are introduced in italics with meanings:

Ikepeke-Abang (2), *Inyang-Aside* (49)

The Translation Challenge: Preserving Subversion

In translating this literary text, we were faced with formidable task of transferring this linguistic subversion into the target language. The primary challenge lies in Anaang terms and culturally specific expressions—which Inegbe often leaves for the reader to infer or explains only implicitly. We adopted foreignizing strategy, maintaining the otherness of the text and getting engage with the Anaang worldview on its own terms.

Translating the linguistic innovation of Inegbe is an act of cultural mediation par excellence. One has to be an ethnographer and a literary critic, intimately familiar with both the formal literary conventions she is defying and the Nigerian culture she is championing. Inegbe's work demands that translators move beyond a strict fidelity to standard grammatical forms and instead seek a dynamic equivalence that prioritizes the effect and intent of the text.

Conclusion

The analysis of linguistic innovation of French in *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe* reveals not only Inegbe's mastery of language but also her commitment to the complex realities of her sociocultural context. Her use of unusual grammatical structures to create a specific rhythm and emphasize certain ideas is remarkable. Inegbe's linguistic innovation testifies

to the vitality of Nigerian literature and its ability to adapt to contemporary societal issues.

Inegbe's linguistic choices go beyond simply narrating a story; they weave a narrative that questions and redefines representations of Nigeria and contemporary Africa. Her work also serves as a meeting point between French and African languages, highlighting the richness of literary expression that speaks to both the heart and mind.

Ultimately, *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe* is a powerful testament to the resilience of a generation, a work that reminds us that despite challenges, there is always room for hope and creativity.

References

- Cellard, J., &Sommant, M. (1979). *500 Mots Nouveaux Définis et Expliqués*, Paris: Duculot.
- Dubois, J. et al. (1973). *Dictionnaire de Linguistique*, Paris: Larousse.
- Dumont, P. (1983). *Le français et les langues Africaines au Sénégal*, Paris: ACCT.
- Greimas, A. J. (1959). "L'actualité du saussurrisme" *Le Français Moderne*, no. 24,191-203.
- Inegbe, M. S. (2020). "Communicative and Speech Challenges of Teaching, Learning and Speaking French as a Foreign Language in Nigeria." *AKSUJEL*, 3(1), 171-181.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12546033>

- Inegbe, M. S.(2023). *Le Tumulted'Itia-Afe-Ekpe*, Ibadan Bwright International Publisher Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12546963>
- Inegbe, M. S.(2024). “Analyse de l'humour conversationnel dans *Ebikaata's Dilemma* de Stephen Inegbe” *Igboscholars International Journal* 17, 2: 81-116.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13901042>
- Inegbe, M. S. (2014). “Igbonglais: Une appropriation du langage dans *A Harvest for Ants* de Kalu Uka” In *A Road Well Conquered: Kalu Uka, Literature and Pedagogy*, 218-229. United Kingdom: Alpha Crownes Publishers.
- Inegbe, M. S. (2024). “Loyauté Ethno-Linguistique et Paradoxe de la Langue dans la Construction Nationale” *Ideal International Journal of Igbo Scholars Forum, Anambra State University, Awka*, 17, 2: 220-243.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13896419>
- Inegbe M. S. (2021).“La signification socio-sémantique desonomastiquescodés dans *L'Amour-cent- vies et Elle sera de Jaspe et de corail* de WerewereLiking” *AGORA: Journal of Foreign Languages Studies*, no. 7: 2-9. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11429342>
- Inegbe M. S. (2022). “La créativité de langue commechoix de style dans *Lessoleils des indépendances* et *Allah n'est pas obligéd'*AhmadouKourouma” ASSU

- JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES: A Journal of Research and Development* 6, no.1: 90-100. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12546188>
- Inegbe, M. S. (2019). "Les écarts syntaxiques comme style dans "La Vie et demie" de Sony LabouTansi " *TOJA: The Oye Journal of Arts, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti* 1, no. 2:325-336. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11430915>
- Inegbe, M. S. (2013). "Le français d'Afrique: Une image variée dans le domaine linguistique" In *Arts, Culture & Communication in a Postcolony*, 276-284, Rochester: Alpha Crowne Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11529184>
- Inegbe, Miriam Stephen (2020). "A Stylistic use of language in selected Nigerian media advertising" *International Review of Humanities Studies, Universitas Indonesia* 5, 1:122-131.
- Kwofie, E. (1984). *French Language Teaching in Africa: Issues in Applied Linguistics*. Lagos: Lagos State University Press.
- Makouta-Mboukou, J-P. (1973). *Le Français en Afrique Noire*, Paris: Bordas.
- Saint-Pierre, M. (1987). "Vers la compétence de communication. Dell H. Hymes, 1984, collection 'Langues et apprentissage des langues'" *Revue québécoise de Linguistique*, 16(2), 319-323.

- Saussure, F. de. (1995). *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, Paris: Editions Payot&Rivages.
- Sartre, J. P. (1948). *Qu'est-ce que la Littérature?* Paris: Editions Gallimard.
- Udosuoro, I. N. (2002). "Foreign Languages in Multilingual Nigeria." In *Language, Literature and Communication*, edited by Imelkiddeh. Uyo: LM Press.
- Valdman, A. (1979). *Le français hors de France*, Paris: Editions Honoré Champion.
- Vinay, J. P., & Darbelnet, J. (1958). *Stylistique Comparée du Français et de l'Anglais*, Paris: Éditions Didier.