A Linguistic-Stylistic Reading of Negritude Ideology in Sophia Akhuemokhan's *Changing Colours*

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Abstract
This study examines linguistic-stylistic strategies and Negritude ideology in Sophia Akhuemokhan's compilation of five short stories and two novellas, *Changing Colours* (2022). Employing a qualitative analysis guided by Leech and Short's framework of speech and thought presentation, the research applies the techniques of direct speech, free indirect speech, and direct thought to reveal how the narratives articulate the characters' struggles with cultural reclamation, collective identity, and Afrocentric resistance to Western imperialism. The methodology involves close reading and extraction of textual excerpts, with a specific focus on relevant passages that depict the emancipation of the characters as well as Afrocentric symbolism. Findings indicate that these linguistic strategies serve not only to transmit ancestral heritage but also to empower characters to assert their self-worth and resist imposed colonial narratives. The study highlights how the seamless integration of direct and reflective narrative modes enables the characters to reclaim and reframe their cultural identity, effectively challenging the distortion or erasure of indigenous traditions. Implications of this research suggest that literary techniques can function as tools of personal expression and collective resistance, offering new perspectives on postcolonial identity formation. This work contributes to ongoing debates in postcolonial literature and Negritude studies by showing how language is harnessed to affirm Black cultural heritage and reinforce the role of storytelling in cultural reclamation and postcolonial resistance.

Keywords: Negritude, cultural reclamation, linguistic-stylistic analysis, diasporic identity, postcolonial literature.

Introduction
Literature is a marker of cultural heritage and serves as a repository of memory and identity for individuals, communities, and nations. Literary texts articulate values, norms, traditions, and historical motifs, reflecting the experiences of people and societies. As a mirror of society, literature both preserves and reinterprets historical narratives (Arfani 151). This expressive function is particularly evident in Negritude (sometimes referred to as Negritudism), a movement

which harnesses literary creativity to reclaim Black identity. The Negritude ideology asserts a triumphant Pan-African, Afrocentric cultural legacy in response to colonial subjugation by the Western world.

Sophia Akhuemokhan's *Changing Colours*, a collection of seven narratives, upholds this ideology through the deployment of linguistic innovation and stylistic creativity as ways of resisting imperialist oppression, celebrating African heritage, and articulating the strength of the Black race in the face of global challenges. This paper, through a linguistic-stylistic analysis of speech and thought presentation in *Changing Colours,* argues that Akhuemokhan's narrative strategies and stylistic choices convey Negritudist tenets by challenging colonial ideologies while affirming the resilience of Black cultural heritage across generations.

Negritude
Negritude is a critical framework that was inspired by blending the French terms 'nègre' (Black) and '-itude' (condition) to reflect a cultural, ideological, and literary movement towards black emancipation and identity in the 1930s. This ideological movement, which was spearheaded by Francophone African and Caribbean intellectuals within the African continent and in the diaspora, sought to reclaim "Blackness" as a source of pride and resistance against colonial oppression. Jan C. Jansen and Jürgen Osterhammel claim the theoretical foundation for the movement was laid by key figures such as the Nardal sisters Paulette and Jeanne, alongside luminaries like Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal's first president), Léon Damas (French Guiana), and Abdoulaye Sadji (45). These thinkers, united by their rejection of colonialism, racism, and Eurocentrism, championed the restoration of African cultural heritage while negotiating complex ties to the imperialist French government.

The preoccupations of Negritude centred on the Marxist view of decolonising identity and asserting cultural autonomy in the black race (Rexer 2). At its core, Negritude confronted the psychological violence of colonialism, which dehumanised Blackness and severed African and diasporic communities from their cultural roots. Writers like Senghor celebrated Africa's spiritual and artistic traditions by framing these artefacts of heritage as counterpoints to Europe's mechanistic worldview.

The Negritude ideology also grappled with the paradox of diasporic belonging – with the tensions of trying to bridge the gap between alienation and ancestral connection to the African heritage. Negritude's emphasis on "Black consciousness" served as a unifying stage for Africans in the continent and the diaspora, inspiring similar movements like Créolité, "Black is Beautiful," and Afro-Surrealism.

Despite the achievements of Negritude, scholars faulted its early depictions of "Blackness" as simplistic, and the Negritude philosophy received severe criticisms for its romanticised view of Africa, particularly as perceived in the works of Frantz Fanon (Nielsen 342). Nonetheless, Negritude undeniably remains a crucial topic that has reshaped global discourses on race, identity, and liberation, affirming that Blackness is not a condition to transcend but a legacy to embrace. It is on this backdrop that Akhuemokhan's text is selected for the exploration of Negritude and the essence of the black identity as revealed in the characters in each story.

Overview of *Changing Colours*
Changing Colours is a 194-page work of inspirational fiction, comprising five short stories and two novellas that form a cohesive narrative. Two elements unify the text: a chronological sequence

from 1446 BCE to the 21st century, and the recurring motif of the onyx tear-drop—a black stone symbolising hope, faith, and the essence of Black identity in Africa. The text explores human suffering, divine faithfulness, Africa's redemptive role, and ethnic tolerance.

Theoretical Background

Style and Stylistics

Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short define style in language as the distinctive linguistic expressions that convey meaning and create specific effects in texts (11). The concept of style also refers to the selection from a total linguistic repertoire that constitutes a given pattern (9). In literary representation, a narrator's style signifies his or her perspective or point of view, which can be subjective or objective. Richard Ohmann corroborates this by describing style as "a way of writing" that comprises both invariant and variable elements of the text, implying that different word choices or arrangements can exist in a text without altering its substance (17).

According to Leech and Short, stylistics is the study of language in the service of literary ends, and it provides techniques and concepts to analyse literary works (11). Stylistics is understood as the study of style, with its main goal being to explain the relationship between language and artistic function (11). Stylistics occupies a significant place in linguistics, providing theoretical tools for language and interpretation that complement other areas of language study (11). Its application extends not only to literary texts but also to non-literary materials and multimodal texts.

Stylistics has attracted scholarly attention from both stylisticians and narratologists and has been criticised by several scholars for focusing too much on language at the expense of broader literary concerns. This criticism has led to the creation of several subfields of stylistics, one of which is linguistic stylistics—a branch that focuses on the role of language in achieving specific artistic or communicative effects in both literary and non-literary texts. This field combines tools from linguistics—such as phonology, syntax, and semantics—with literary analysis to examine how linguistic choices shape meaning, tone, and style.

Linguistic Stylistics

Linguistic stylistics examines language through the lens of linguistic theory and stylistic analysis to evaluate or refine linguistic models, thereby advancing theoretical frameworks (Jeffries and McIntyre 7). It emerged as a corrective measure to traditional literary criticism, which often overlooked systematic linguistic analysis. This approach diverges from subjective interpretation by prioritising the "linguistic frameworks operative in the text" (Ayeomoni 177). Unlike literary criticism, which relies to a greater measure on personal evaluation, linguistic stylistics offers a structured framework for textual analysis, enabling critics to identify specific linguistic features and validate their interpretations through empirical methods (Jeffries and McIntyre 8).

Leech and Short's Speech and Thought Presentation

This paper adopts Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short's model of speech and thought presentation for a linguistic-stylistic investigation of how authors convey characters' voices and internal thoughts in literary texts. For Leech and Short, language plays a key role in stylistics as a branch of applied linguistics because it enables the interpretation of both literary and non-literary texts (9–13).

Leech and Short identify five primary categories of speech presentation in stylistic analysis: Direct Speech (DS), Indirect Speech (IS), Free Direct Speech (FDS), Free Indirect

Speech (FIS), and the Narrative Report of Speech Act (NRSA) (255). They note that speech presentation can be direct, indirect, or free indirect, with each form serving distinct narrative functions. Direct Speech presents a character's exact words within quotation marks, while Indirect Speech paraphrases what a character has said, often shifting the perspective to that of the narrator. Free Direct Speech eliminates the reporting clause, presenting the character's speech as if unmediated by the narrator, thereby enhancing immediacy. Free Indirect Speech blends the character's voice with that of the narrator, allowing readers access to the character's thoughts while maintaining narrative distance. Finally, the Narrative Report of Speech Act summarises or interprets what a character has said without providing verbatim dialogue.

In terms of thought presentation, Leech and Short similarly categorise methods—sometimes referred to as "stream of consciousness"—to reveal a character's inner thoughts, memories, and emotions (270). They propose that the writer offers direct access to mental processes using Direct Thought (DT), Indirect Thought (IT), Free Direct Thought (FDT), Free Indirect Thought (FIT), and the Narrative Report of Thought Act (NRTA). Direct Thought presents a character's thoughts verbatim, whereas Indirect Thought paraphrases them. Free Direct Thought presents thoughts without a reporting clause, creating an intimate connection between the reader and the character's mental state, while Free Indirect Thought merges the narrator's voice with the character's thoughts for a nuanced exploration of internal experiences. The Narrative Report of Thought Act summarises or interprets a character's thoughts without direct quotation. These techniques differ in their use of linguistic markers such as tense shifts, pronoun changes, and the presence or absence of reporting clauses (Leech and Short 271).

In summary, Leech and Short's model serves as a vital tool for literary analysis, enabling scholars to dissect the intricate ways in which language constructs meaning in fiction. In this study, it is applied to analyse the various forms of speech and thought presentation in Akhuemokhan's *Changing Colours,* allowing the audience to appreciate how the author creates complex characters, designs elaborate spatiotemporal settings, and conveys multifaceted narratives that resonate with broader themes of spirituality, black culture, and Pan-Africanist identity.

Review of Literature
Several scholars have explored the Negritude philosophy, often celebrated as the "war machine" of Pan-African resistance and Black ideological restoration. Merve Fejzula employs feminist theory and archival analysis to examine the gendered dynamics of the 1956 Congress of Black Writers and Artists. Her exploration of the overlooked contributions of Christiane Yandé Diop and Dorothy Brooks reveals that the conflation of intellectual and domestic work within private spaces helps to maintain gendered hierarchies in Negritude's intellectual practice (Fejzula 423). In contrast, Léopold Sédar Senghor's theoretical defence of Negritude refutes charges of racialism through an alignment with global humanism. His comparative study of African civilisational distinctiveness shows that Negritude affirms Black identity while offering a tool for liberation — a perspective that reflects aspects of the Harlem Renaissance's "New Negro" ethos (Senghor 220).

Alys Moody examines Negritude's anticolonial primitivism through a dialectical engagement with René Ménil's Marxist critiques. Her side-by-side consideration of Ménil's scepticism and the works of Césaire and Senghor reveals that Negritude undermines Eurocentric historical narratives by discovering revolutionary potential in non-modern forms of knowledge; this approach challenges conventional Marxist frameworks and anticipates current debates on decolonial subjectivity (Moody 179). Similarly, Sara Raimondi and Hannah Richter combine Deleuzian vitalism with Negritude's philosophical assertions to portray the movement as a

"literary war machine" opposing colonial modernity. Their examination of Senghor and the Césaires demonstrates that Negritude's embrace of affective relationality and African rhythms disrupts Cartesian binaries, paving the way for a futuristic ontology that transcends traditional Sartrean dialectics and reimagines post-colonial political life (Raimondi and Richter 225).

Adidi et al. critically examine Senghor's Negritude as an endeavour to reclaim African cultural authenticity in the wake of colonial erasure. Their textual analysis highlights tensions between Senghor's idealisation of African heritage and the complexities of postcolonial identity, suggesting that his seminal vision calls for reassessment in today's decolonial context. Komarine Romdenh-Romluc reconsiders Fanon's engagement with Negritude from an existentialist angle while offering a critique of Sartre's interpretation in Black Orpheus. Her focus on Césaire's nekyia as a form of healing supports the argument that Fanon selectively embraces Negritude's cultural revival while sidestepping its essentialist limitations, thus crafting a psycho-political critique of colonial alienation (Romdenh-Romluc 47). Mercy Eghonghon Odudigbo adopts a socio-historical approach to analyse Mongo Beti's *Ville Cruelle*, exposing the collusion between colonial powers and African gerontocracies in exploiting youth. Her study argues that Beti's pseudonymous narrative uncovers economic exploitation hidden beneath cultural tradition, challenging the movement's oversimplified narratives of anti-colonial solidarity (Odudigbo 248). Fatima Benrebai investigates the poetry of Noemia de Sousa and Senghor through postcolonial literary theory, placing motifs of ancestral memory and identity at the heart of their works as acts of cultural reclamation against Eurocentric dominance. Her analysis suggests that the blending of heritage and resistance anticipates modern decolonial aesthetics (Benrebai 1308).

Justification for the Study

Despite the growing scholarship on the Negritude movement, little critical attention has been paid to Akhuemokhan's *Changing Colours.* Existing studies on Negritude have largely centred on its philosophical and ideological dimensions, often overlooking the role of linguistic stylistics in shaping the thematic concerns of these literary works. This study addresses that gap by applying Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short's model of speech and thought presentation to analyse how Akhuemokhan's narrative strategies reinforce key philosophies of Negritude in her collection of stories.

Methodology

The paper employs a qualitative textual analysis as its research design. It is descriptive, relies on non-numerical data, and focuses on explaining why and how a particular phenomenon operates rather than how frequently it occurs (Creswell and Creswell 13). Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod describe qualitative research as a helpful method for addressing exploratory or interpretive research questions (270).

The primary text for the study is Sophia Akhuemokhan's *Changing Colours,* and the analysis covers the five short stories and two novellas which comprise the book. The choice of the text is hinged on its embodiment of Negritudism, as it vividly explores themes of cultural reclamation, diasporic identity, and resistance to colonial domination. The paper also makes use of secondary sources such as articles from journals, textbooks, and web sources to corroborate the data from the primary text.

Following Creswell and Creswell's guidelines, the text was read and relevant excerpts were extracted for the identification of patterns in the presentation of speech and thought (Creswell and Creswell 43–45). The relevant passages were then coded into categories such as Direct Speech,

Indirect Speech, Free Direct Speech, and Free Indirect Speech (Leech and Short 255). This process probes how Akhuemokhan's stylistic choices and narrative language in *Changing Colours* promote the Negritude themes of resistance to imperialism and the pride of the African heritage.

Analysis

Cultural Reclamation
Several stories in *Changing Colours* prominently feature the theme of cultural reclamation, where the characters actively engage with and assert their cultural heritage in the face of diverse kinds of imperialism. The "Preamble" establishes this theme through the protagonist Melody's narration of her rich heritage to her ailing daughter, Tabara, which introduces the onyx tear-drop, the emblem of their faith as members of Black Malachi:

> Every black stone in these watches is a fragment of onyx, an onyx tear-drop reminding us that God is faithful and will wipe away our tears. It's the logo of our community, Black Malachi. We're a team of survivors, Tabby, never doubt that. ('Preamble' 3)

Melody's motivational words to Tabara, presented primarily through direct speech (DS) as Melody explains her ancestry and the link to the onyx, serve as a vital transfer of cultural knowledge and recital of values across generations. The directness of Melody's voice aligns with the Negritude emphasis on preserving and celebrating African identity using storytelling techniques.

In "Changing Colours," the story of Neit, a character of Chaldean-Egyptian and Ethiopian ancestry, further explores cultural reclamation. Neit's awareness of her biracial heritage is presented mainly in a first-person limited point of view, with the narrator telling the story from a single character's perspective, limited to their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Neit often employs the "I" pronoun as she reflects on her identity in a multicultural background.

Also, her triumph over the challenges of slavery and racial prejudice from Iset, a white Jew, as well as her personal journey towards controlling her temper, can be seen as a form of internal reclamation, thereby asserting her self-worth and agency against external pressures. The narrative's focus on her challenges and subsequent self-reclamation is evident in the excerpt where Onyx (Neit's sister) explains how the council of elders exonerated Neit from Iset's charge of blasphemy:

> It was a mess. The elders called Iset first. She said you blasphemed El Shaddai and you damned the God of the Hebrews. When they sent Iset away, they called Tirzah. She mixed the story up and said you blasphemed Elohim and damned the God of Israel. They called Iset back. "The testimonies don't agree," they told her. She went blank then said, "It wasn't El Shaddai, it was Adonai." They called Tirzah. She unhinged and changed "the God of Israel" to "the Mighty One of Jacob." And Zeruah was as lost as a hut in a field of cucumbers. She kept mumbling about the Eternal, the Shepherd, and, you won't believe it, the One Who Hears!" Onyx wiped my cheeks with the edge of her shawl. "Another word from them and they would have been stoned themselves. You can stop crying, the verdict is 'not guilty'." I couldn't talk. I rested my head on my sister's shoulder and we huddled together on the mat, three turtle doves thanking God. ('Changing Colours' 19)

The excerpt employs Direct Speech (DS) to present the characters' conflicting testimonies on divine names, exposing the fragmentation of cultural narratives imposed by colonial religious discourse. The verbatim dialogue— "You blasphemed El Shaddai… It wasn't El Shaddai, it was

Adonai…"—illustrates DS by conveying unmediated voices that reveal a history of contested identity. This cacophony reflects the struggle within Neit's cultural heritage, where external pressures distort sacred traditions. Simultaneously, Free Indirect Speech (FIS) is evident in the narrator's subtle interweaving of personal reflection, as Neit's silence and her physical retreat— resting her head on her sister's shoulder amidst symbolic "three turtle doves" —suggest an internal process of reclaiming selfhood. The blending of DS and FIS encapsulates Neit's journey toward cultural reclamation, as she absorbs the chaotic external narratives and, through introspection, reaffirms her authentic identity in defiance of colonial impositions.

Diasporic Identity
The theme of diasporic identity, which refers to the experience of displacement and the negotiation of multiple cultural influences, is central to "Rock" and "Fresh Fish."

The story "Rock" follows Naomi, a seven-year-old Black Jew who was sold into slavery in Damascus between 852 and 841 BC. Narrated in a limited third-person perspective, the narrative emphasises diasporic identity through Naomi's memories of home and her worldview in a foreign land. An instance of such recollection is represented during the incident after Hanani's playful statement, when she slips into a flashback: Naomi thought,

> If his voice wasn't so loud, he would sound like mother." A memory of home slipped into her mind—her village outlying Kedesh in northern Israel, dusk darkening the hills and fields—and her fifth birthday, sitting on her mother's knees, snuggled against her mother's warmth in the safety of their limestone hut. "God will wipe away our tears, little one," her mother had said, showing her a gold chain with a pendant of black onyx shaped like a tear-drop. "That's the meaning of this necklace. It's for you, for your birthday." ("Rock" 22)

Naomi's memory of her village in northern Israel, presented through flashback using free indirect discourse, helps capture her nostalgic reflections in this unfriendly location. This thought process underscores her connection to her cultural roots even in a foreign and oppressive environment. Also, her ability to provide the cure for her mistress (and eventually her master) using knowledge potentially rooted in her cultural background demonstrates the enduring value and applicability of her heritage despite her dislocation from her motherland. These diasporic links help to reaffirm Naomi's enduring bond with her heritage, inspiring hope and resistance against the dehumanising forces of slavery.

In "Fresh Fish," Shalom (an Eritrean woman married to a Nigerian and living in southern Nigeria) embodies the complexities of biracial identity in the African continent. Shalom's internal struggles and external interactions are conveyed through a third-person limited point of view, with Shalom serving as the central consciousness. Her anxieties about her son, Junior, potentially ending up in jail, a fear stemming from her past drug abuse in the United States, reveal the layered nature of her diasporic experience.

At the point of almost strangling her step-daughter, Blessing, (who is alleged to be an 'abiku' or spirit-child), Shalom utters "Adios, mi Amiga," the Spanish equivalent for "Goodbye, my friend" ("Fresh Fish" 80). This conversation with Blessing is presented through Direct Speech (DS), thereby revealing linguistic code-switching and the incorporation of European elements, reflecting Shalom's multifaceted identity as a person living far away from her traditional roots.

Moreover, Shalom's seeking solutions through both traditional African medicine (consulting native doctors) and Christian practices (pastors) illustrates the blending of multicultural resources in her life, which ultimately lead to her redemption. In the end, Shalom's

status does not change, but her outlook on life becomes positive, a sign that she has learnt to adapt to the pressures that come with living in a foreign environment.

Resistance to Colonial Ideologies

Changing Colours also contains some stories depicting characters resisting oppressive forces, an act which can be interpreted as resistance to the lingering effects of colonial ideologies or broader power imbalances involving Western-type civilizations. "Curriculum" is a novella presented in a third-person omniscient point of view, and it gives a contemporary and complex form of resistance through the actions of Melody, a Madjai patrol police officer. Melody struggles to protect her honour and moral standards against perceived Western influences. This action, leading to the accidental death of an individual and Melody's subsequent punishment and pursuit by her clone, Rita, showcases a struggle against changing societal norms and a desperate attempt to preserve a certain cultural order in a postcolonial context. Melody's words to Tabara: "God's timetable to reclaim Africa. It foretells trouble in Egypt, remember? The Book of Ezekiel" ("Curriculum" 96) is a Direct Speech (DS) that echoes Melody's motivations as well as illustrating her resistance to the violent situation around her personality. Her fight against Rita, her artificial clone, can be interpreted as a battle against the destructive consequences of her own actions and the societal pressures she embodies.

In the second novella, "King of Africa," the narrative employs a first-person perspective to detail Venunye's transformation from potential oppressor to a figure of resistance (121). The cyclical plot, enriched by flashbacks, traces Venunye's initial self-enthronement and trust in destructive artificial intelligence and cloning technologies, followed by repentance and alliance with Black Malachi against an "anti-Christ" figure. In Venunye's hour of triumph, the internal monologue is rendered through Direct Thought:

> I looked at the sky again. It stretched unbroken from east to west, as if there was nothing behind it. A mirage. I could almost hear Him: 'And behold, I am coming quickly…. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.' Jesus Christ, Soon-coming King. I kept looking upwards, smiling. He would come back for us. He promised. 'Soon now, Lord,' I said, 'very soon.' ("King of Africa" 194)

This direct internal rendering, coming after the fall of his archenemies Roshaun and Caleb, captures Venunye's immediate emotional response and reinforces his commitment to resisting oppressive forces that wage an unending war against Black Malachi, while serving as the pastor of the end-time church.

Conclusion

This study argues that, through a linguistic-stylistic exploration of speech and thought presentation in *Changing Colours,* Akhuemokhan's narrative strategies reconfigure Negritude's ideological core, thereby positioning the text as a powerful testament of Afrocentric reclamation, identity, and resistance. Findings reveal that speech and thought processes contribute uniquely to conveying characters' internal struggles, cultural memories, and collective identities. These techniques of storytelling not only facilitate the transmission of ancestral heritage but also challenge imposed

colonial narratives by allowing the characters in the respective stories to assert their self-worth as bona fide members of the Negritude movement.

The study highlights the significance of stylistic choices in literature because these stylistic elements reveal the enduring impact of cultural reclamation, capture the complexities of diasporic identity, and present novel ways by which individuals in Africa and beyond challenge longstanding threats to the African civilisation. The implications of the research suggest that such linguistic strategies serve as both a mode of personal expression and a tool for collective resistance. In contributing to the knowledge of postcolonial literature and Negritude studies, this work deepens our understanding of how language can be employed to reaffirm Black cultural heritage and resist the forces of cultural erasure.

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