JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Vidyasagar University, Midnapore-721102, WB
Volume 19, 2026
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

Semiotic Resistance in the Margins: Racio-Cultural Markedness and the Assertion of Linguistic Identity in Postcolonial Literature

Md. Samiul Azim

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Gazole Mahavidyalaya, Malda, West Bengal

&

Md. Akidul Hoque

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Gazole Mahavidyalaya, Malda, West Bengal

Abstract

This interdisciplinary study interrogates the interplay between racio-cultural markedness and linguistic identity within postcolonial literary texts, positing literature as a site of semiotic resistance against sociolinguistic hegemony. Drawing on frameworks from critical race theory, sociolinguistics, and postcolonial discourse analysis, the article examines how marginalized communities deploy marked linguistic codes—vernacular lexicons, code-switching, and subaltern speech acts—to destabilize colonial legacies of linguistic erasure and reassert cultural autonomy. Through a close reading of 21st-century Anglophone and Francophone postcolonial novels, including works by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Jamaica Kincaid, and Mohammed Dib, the analysis reveals how authors strategically weaponize linguistic hybridity to subvert racio-cultural hierarchies embedded in globalized "prestige" languages. By foregrounding the tension between *authenticity* and *assimilation*, the study illuminates the paradoxes of linguistic markedness: while vernacular forms index cultural resistance, they simultaneously risk re-marginalization within dominant literary canons. Methodologically, the article bridges textual analysis with ethnographic insights from communities undergoing language revitalization, arguing that postcolonial literature functions as both an archive of endangered semiotic practices and a dynamic space for renegotiating identity. Findings underscore the role of literary discourse in contesting neoliberal language ideologies that commodify linguistic diversity while perpetuating epistemic violence. However, the study also critiques romanticized narratives of resistance, highlighting how globalization exacerbates tensions between heritage preservation and the pragmatic demands of linguistic survival. Ultimately, this research contributes to debates in linguistic anthropology and postcolonial studies by reframing racio-cultural markedness not as a deficit but as a politicized semiotic strategy, urging scholars to recalibrate theories of communicative

JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Vidyasagar University, Midnapore-721102, WB
Volume 19, 2026
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

competence to accommodate the fractured, polyvocal realities of postcolonial speech communities.

Keywords: Semiotic resistance, Racio-cultural markedness, Postcolonial literature, Linguistic identity, Sociolinguistic hegemony, Subaltern discourse

I. Introduction

The global linguistic landscape, shaped by centuries of colonial domination and neoliberal globalization, stands as a testament to the violent hierarchies that privilege certain languages while rendering others marginal or obsolete. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o contends in *Decolonising the Mind*, colonial languages such as English and French were not just carriers of culture but also the culture itself," systematically erasing Indigenous epistemologies to consolidate imperial power (17). This epistemicide, to borrow Santos' term, has precipitated a crisis of linguistic diversity: UNESCO estimates that 40% of the world's 7,000 languages face extinction by 2100, with Indigenous and minority languages disproportionately endangered ("Atlas of the World's Languages"). Yet, within this landscape of erasure, postcolonial literatures emerge as contested sites where racio-cultural markedness—the sociolinguistic coding of certain languages as racially or culturally "Other"—is simultaneously reinscribed and subverted. This article interrogates how 21st-century postcolonial texts deploy marked linguistic practices to assert subaltern identities, while navigating the paradoxes of resistance within enduring structures of sociolinguistic hegemony.

The concept of racio-cultural markedness, as theorized by Bucholtz and Hall, hinges on the hierarchical binary between "unmarked" colonial languages (e.g., English) and "marked" vernaculars relegated to the margins of global discourse (372). Such hierarchies, as Phillipson argues, are perpetuated by "linguistic imperialism," wherein dominant languages function as tools of cultural and economic control (47). Postcolonial writers, however, disrupt this hegemony through strategic acts of semiotic resistance: embedding vernacular lexicons, code-switching, and subaltern speech acts into literary texts. Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*, for instance, fractures the colonial gaze by interlacing Antiguan Creole with acerbic Standard English, forcing readers to confront the "grammar of dispossession" (Spivak 76). These textual practices, as Bhabha notes, create a "third space" of hybridity that destabilizes fixed colonial binaries (37). Yet, as Huggan warns, such resistance risks commodification within global literary markets that exoticize "difference" while perpetuating epistemic violence (*The Postcolonial Exotic* 32). This tension between subversion and co-optation underscores the central paradox this article examines: how can marked languages assert cultural autonomy without being reinscribed into neoliberal multiculturalism's "diversity" fetish?

JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Vidyasagar University, Midnapore-721102, WB
Volume 19, 2026
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

Existing scholarship on postcolonial literature and linguistic identity remains fragmented across disciplines. Sociolinguists like Myers-Scotton have meticulously mapped code-switching's pragmatic functions but often neglect its literary resonance as resistance (25-28). Conversely, literary theorists, as Ashcroft et al. demonstrate, prioritize metaphorical "abrogation" of colonial languages yet underplay how racialized linguistic hierarchies shape reception (*The Empire Writes Back* 38-41). Critical race theorists, particularly Alim and Reyes, bridge this gap by analyzing "raciolinguistic ideologies," but their focus on oral discourses sidelines written texts' unique capacity to archive endangered semiotic practices (472). This article addresses these lacunae by proposing an interdisciplinary framework that synthesizes sociolinguistic markedness theory, critical race studies, and postcolonial literary analysis. As Mignolo urges, "border thinking" demands we "delink" from Eurocentric epistemologies to center subaltern modes of knowledge production (xxi). By analyzing novels like Mohammed Dib's *Who Remembers the Sea*, which interweaves Algerian Arabic with French to memorialize anti-colonial resistance, this study positions literature as both an archive of endangered languages and a laboratory for decolonial futures.

However, this project confronts conceptual and methodological tensions. First, the romanticization of "resistance" in postcolonial studies often obscures how linguistic hybridity can reinforce marginalization. As Achebe cautions, the African writer's use of colonial languages, though subversive, remains a fatalistic acceptance of the inevitability of English (xiv). Second, the very act of analyzing markedness within academic discourse—a regime dominated by English—risks reifying the hierarchies it seeks to critique. Derrida's admonition that "there is no outside-text" (172) looms large here: can subaltern speech ever be represented without mediation by hegemonic systems? Third, the neoliberal academy's demand for "diverse" voices often reduce marked languages to aesthetic tokens, a dynamic which Parry critiques as the institutionalization of postcoloniality (3). To navigate these pitfalls, this study adopts a self-reflexive methodology, combining close reading with ethnographic insights from language revitalization movements in Mauritius and Martinique, where activists negotiate similar tensions between cultural preservation and global legibility.

This article's significance lies in its recalibration of communicative competence models to accommodate the fractured realities of postcolonial speech communities. Where Hymes' original formulation emphasized mastery of homogeneous speech norms (15), this study, following Rosa and Flores, posits "racialinguistic enregisterment" as a survival strategy within asymmetrical power structures (623). Furthermore, it contributes to debates on decolonial pedagogy by advocating for literary curricula that center marginalized linguistic practices not as "exotic" supplements but as epistemic equals. As wa Thiong'o insists, language is the ultimate marker of identity, the storehouse of memory (41)—a claim this article tests against the neoliberal commodification of diversity.

JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Vidyasagar University, Midnapore-721102, WB
Volume 19, 2026
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

In sum, this introduction frames the study's intervention within intersecting crises of linguistic extinction, racialized marginalization, and neoliberal co-optation. By interrogating how postcolonial literature both resists and reproduces racio-cultural markedness, it seeks to advance a more nuanced understanding of linguistic identity—one that acknowledges the fraught agency of subaltern voices navigating what Glissant terms the "chaos-world" of globalized cultural encounters (6).

2. Literature Review

The interrogation of linguistic identity within postcolonial literature necessitates an interdisciplinary synthesis of sociolinguistic, literary, and critical race theories, each grappling with the paradoxes of resistance and marginalization in contested semiotic landscapes. This section maps the theoretical terrain, evaluates scholarly debates, and identifies lacunae that this study seeks to address.

2.1. Theoretical Foundations

Postcolonial theory provides the cornerstone for understanding linguistic resistance as a counter-hegemonic practice. Frantz Fanon's assertion that "to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (25) underscores the racialized violence embedded in colonial linguistic imposition, a theme expanded by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's polemic against the "cultural bomb" of English hegemony (*Decolonising the Mind* 3). Homi Bhabha's conceptualization of hybridity as a "third space" disrupting colonial binaries (37) informs analyses of code-switching and vernacular intrusion in texts like Mohammed Dib's *Who Remembers the Sea*, where Algerian Arabic disrupts French narrative structures to memorialize anti-colonial resistance. However, such interventions risk romanticization; as Graham Huggan cautions, the "postcolonial exotic" commodifies cultural difference, reducing resistance to marketable aesthetic tokens (32).

Sociolinguistic frameworks further elucidate the mechanics of racio-cultural markedness. Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall define markedness as a hierarchical system privileging "unmarked" linguistic practices associated with whiteness and coloniality (372), while Robert Phillipson's "linguistic imperialism" thesis exposes how global English perpetuates epistemicide (47). Critical race theorists, notably H. Samy Alim and Angela Reyes, extend this analysis through "raciolinguistics," interrogating how racialized bodies are "heard" through hegemonic listening practices (472). Yet, as Jonathan Rosa and Nelson Flores argue, such frameworks often neglect written texts' capacity to archive subaltern semiotics, privileging oral discourse (623).

2.2. Key Scholarly Debates

Central to postcolonial literary studies is the tension between linguistic authenticity and assimilation. Chinua Achebe's defence of English as a vehicle for African storytelling—despite its colonial roots—highlights the pragmatic compromises marginalized writers face (91). Conversely, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's rejection of

JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Vidyasagar University, Midnapore-721102, WB
Volume 19, 2026
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

European languages as "agents of cultural estrangement" (*Decolonising* 28) epitomizes the radical stance favouring vernacular reclamation. This dichotomy, however, obscures nuanced intermediary strategies. Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* exemplifies such complexity, deploying Antiguan Creole not as a "pure" vernacular but as a destabilizing force within Standard English, interrogating the "grammar of dispossession" (Spivak 76).

The commodification of linguistic diversity within global literary markets further complicates resistance. Huggan's critique of "staged marginality" (*Postcolonial Exotic* 15) resonates with Benita Parry's warning against the "institutionalization of postcoloniality" (13), wherein marked languages become fetishized symbols of multiculturalism rather than epistemic equals. Derek Walcott's Caribbean poetry, celebrated for its Creole-infused lyricism, exemplifies this paradox: while subverting colonial aesthetics, its reception often reinforces exoticizing tropes. Such dynamics reveal the neoliberal co-optation of resistance, a process Boaventura de Sousa Santos terms "epistemicide"—the systematic erasure of subaltern knowledge systems (92).

2.3. Gaps in Existing Scholarship

Despite robust theoretical engagement, critical gaps persist. First, 21st-century postcolonial literatures remain underexplored as dynamic sites of linguistic innovation. While Ashcroft et al.'s *The Empire Writes Back* canonizes early postcolonial texts (38-41), contemporary works like Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*, which hybridizes Cameroonian Pidgin and English, demand fresh analytical lenses. Second, the nexus between racio-cultural markedness and language revitalization remains under-theorized. Sociolinguists like Myers-Scotton meticulously analyze code-switching's pragmatic functions (25-28) but sidestep its literary-political resonance. Conversely, literary scholars often overlook grassroots language movements, such as Martinican Creole activism, which parallel textual resistance.

Finally, the absence of ethnographic methodologies in literary studies limits engagement with lived linguistic realities. While Gayatri Spivak's provocation—"Can the Subaltern Speak?" (271)—haunts postcolonial theory, few scholars bridge textual analysis with subaltern communities' self-representation strategies. This study addresses these gaps by integrating critical discourse analysis of 21st-century novels with ethnography from language revitalization initiatives, thus recentering marginalized voices in academic discourse.

3. Theoretical Framework

The analytical lens through which this study examines racio-cultural markedness and linguistic identity in postcolonial literature emerges from an interdisciplinary confluence of sociolinguistic, decolonial, and critical race theories. This framework interrogates the interplay between language as a tool of hegemony and

JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Vidyasagar University, Midnapore-721102, WB
Volume 19, 2026
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

as a site of resistance, while navigating the epistemological fissures that arise when subaltern semiotics confront globalized linguistic hierarchies.

3.1. Racio-Cultural Markedness and the Colonial Linguistic Order

Racio-cultural markedness, as conceptualized by Bucholtz and Hall, operates through a binary logic that positions colonial languages (e.g., English, French) as "unmarked" norms, while vernaculars are coded as racially or culturally "deviant" (372). This hierarchy, rooted in what Phillipson terms "linguistic imperialism," constructs European languages as "universal" vessels of modernity, relegating Indigenous and creolized tongues to the periphery of epistemic legitimacy (47). The markedness paradigm intersects with Judith Butler's theory of performativity; wherein racialized identities are "materialized" through repeated linguistic acts that naturalize colonial power structures (33). For instance, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's decision to abandon English for Gĩkũyũ in *Devil on the Cross* performs a counter-hegemonic identity, destabilizing the "colonial library" (Mudimbe 194) that equates African languages with primitivism.

However, critiques of markedness theory highlight its potential to reify the very binaries it seeks to dismantle. Derrida's deconstructionist axiom—"there is no outside-text" (158)—problematizes the notion of "pure" vernacular resistance, as all linguistic acts remain entangled in colonial semiotic systems. Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "linguistic terrorism" (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 55) underscores how markedness hierarchies are internalized by marginalized communities, perpetuating self-erasure. This study thus adopts a dialectical view of markedness: neither a static binary nor a liberatory tool, but a contested terrain where resistance and complicity coexist.

3.2. Semiotic Resistance: Hybridity, Polyphony, and the Third Space

Semiotic resistance in postcolonial texts is theorized through Bhabha's "third space" of enunciation, where hybrid linguistic practices "elude the politics of polarity" (37). Bakhtin's dialogic imagination further enriches this framework, positing literary texts as polyphonic arenas where multiple voices—colonial and subaltern—clash and coalesce (291). In Mohammed Dib's *Who Remembers the Sea*, the interleaving of French and Algerian Arabic exemplifies such polyphony, transforming the novel into a "palimpsest of struggle" (Said 66) that memorializes anti-colonial resistance. Yet, as Huggan warns, hybridity risks commodification within neoliberal markets that exoticize "difference" while neutralizing its political charge (*Postcolonial Exotic* 32).

This tension necessitates a recalibration of resistance theory. Drawing on Mignolo's "border thinking," which advocates epistemic delinking from Western logics (xxi), the study reconceives semiotic resistance not as mere code-switching but as a *decolonial praxis*. For instance, Jamaica Kincaid's deployment of Antiguan Creole in *A Small Place* does not merely "abrogate" Standard English

JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Vidyasagar University, Midnapore-721102, WB
Volume 19, 2026
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

(Ashcroft et al. 38) but enacts what Wynter terms a "counter-poetics" (46), recentering Caribbean epistemes erased by colonial historiography. However, this approach must contend with Spivak's caution that subaltern speech remains "irretrievably heterogeneous" (309), always already mediated by hegemonic interpretive frameworks.

3.3. Linguistic Identity in the Postcolonial "Chaos-World"

Postcolonial linguistic identity is reconceptualized through Stuart Hall's notion of cultural identity as a "production," perpetually reinvented within "the vectors of similarity and difference" (225). This fluidity is amplified in Glissant's "chaos-world" (*Poetics of Relation* 6), where globalization fractures static notions of linguistic belonging. Rosa and Flores' "raciolinguistic enregisterment" model extends this analysis, positing that racialized speakers "style" their language to navigate oppressive auditory regimes (623). For example, in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*, Cameroonian Pidgin becomes a tactical enregisterment, asserting communal solidarity against corporate Anglophone hegemony.

Yet, the neoliberal co-optation of diversity complicates such resistance. Walter Mignolo's critique of "global designs" (xxi) reveals how institutions tokenize marked languages as multicultural "flavor" while maintaining Eurocentric knowledge economies. This dynamic mirrors Santos' "epistemicide" (92), wherein subaltern semiotics are archived as cultural artifacts rather than living epistemologies. To counter this, the study integrates Anzaldúa's *mestiza consciousness*—a "tolerance for contradictions" (79) that embraces linguistic multiplicity without romanticizing hybridity's emancipatory potential.

Synthesis and Critical Tensions

The theoretical framework's strength lies in its refusal to resolve these contradictions. By holding Bhabha's hybridity in tension with Huggan's commodification thesis, and Mignolo's decolonial praxis against Spivak's subaltern silencing, it mirrors the "interminable dialogue" (Bakhtin 293) of postcolonial literature itself. However, this approach risks overprivileging textual analysis at the expense of grassroots linguistic activism—a gap mitigated by incorporating ethnographic insights from Martinican Creole revitalization movements, where oral and written resistance strategies converge.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a critical discourse-analytic and literary interpretive framework to interrogate the interplay of racio-cultural markedness and linguistic identity in postcolonial literature. Through a synthesis of close textual analysis**,** semiotic interpretation and critical theory, the methodology addresses the tensions between language, identity, and cultural power embedded in postcolonial literary texts. It aims to reveal how these texts function as both archives of subaltern semiotic practices and spaces of aesthetic resistance.

JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Vidyasagar University, Midnapore-721102, WB
Volume 19, 2026
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

4.1. Research Design and Corpus Selection

The research adopts a *triangulated approach* to reconcile the textual focus of postcolonial studies with the embodied realities of language revitalization movements. The primary corpus comprises 21st-century Anglophone and Francophone postcolonial novels selected through purposive sampling, prioritizing texts that explicitly engage with vernacular codes, racialized identity politics, and cultural survival. Key criteria include:

1. **Linguistic Hybridity**: Works like Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* (Cameroonian Pidgin/English) and Mohammed Dib's *Who Remembers the Sea* (Algerian Arabic/French), which destabilize colonial linguistic hierarchies through code-switching.
2. **Temporal Relevance**: Focus on post-2000 publications to capture neoliberal globalization's impact on linguistic markets.
3. **Geographic Diversity**: Inclusion of Caribbean, African, and Maghrebi texts to avoid regional exceptionalism.

This study draws on publicly available narratives and activist commentary from Martinique and Mauritius, aligning them with literary representations. As Geertz advocates, "thick description" of these communities' struggles provides a grounded counterpoint to textual analysis, illuminating how "local knowledge" contests global hegemonies (26).

4.2. Analytical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): Rooted in Fairclough's three-dimensional model (38), this study examines linguistic markers of racio-cultural markedness—lexical choices, code-switching patterns, and narrative structures—to unveil power dynamics in literary texts. For instance, Jamaica Kincaid's strategic use of Antiguan Creole pronouns in *A Small Place* ("you" vs. "we") is analyzed as a grammatical weaponization of collective memory against colonial historiography.

Semiotic Analysis: Drawing on Barthes' mythologies (109) and Bakhtinian dialogism (291), the study decodes literary texts as polyphonic arenas where vernacular symbols (e.g., Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's Gĩkũyũ proverbs) subvert colonial semiotic regimes. This approach extends Silverstein's concept of "total linguistic fact" (536), treating language as simultaneously grammatical, interactional, and ideological.

Instead of direct fieldwork, this study draws on publicly available narratives, activist commentaries, and secondary sources related to Creole revitalization efforts in Martinique. These sources shed light on how oral traditions and vernacular expressions have been strategically mobilized in written and digital activism. For instance, debates around the emotional resonance of Creole versus the institutional dominance of French reveal the complexities faced by language

JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Vidyasagar University, Midnapore-721102, WB
Volume 19, 2026
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

activists negotiating visibility, legibility, and cultural autonomy. These tensions are examined in parallel with literary representations, highlighting the dialogic interplay between grassroots linguistic innovation and postcolonial textual strategies.

4.3. Ethical and Conceptual Considerations

The methodology confronts three key challenges:

1. **Representational Ethics**: As Spivak warns, academic interpretation risks "epistemic violence" by speaking for subaltern communities (291). To remain critically self-reflexive, the study acknowledges the limitations of textual analysis in fully capturing lived linguistic experiences and foregrounds a decolonial hermeneutic that centers subaltern epistemologies without presuming to speak on their behalf.
2. **Positionality**: The researcher's position as a Western-educated scholar necessitates methodological self-reflexivity. Following Alcoff, "the problem of speaking about others" (25) is addressed by critically examining the positionality and interpretive frameworks shaping the analysis, and by foregrounding subaltern voices through textual representations rather than prescriptive generalizations.
3. **Synthesis**: Combining literary and theoretical analysis with critical discourse perspectives risks methodological incoherence. This is resolved through **crystallization** (Richardson 934), a postmodern alternative to triangulation that embraces contradictory findings as evidence of complexity and multiplicity in interpretive inquiry

4.4. Limitations and Counterarguments

Critics may argue that focusing on published authors inadvertently recenters elite "native informants" (Parry 17) while marginalizing non-literate communities. While valid, this critique is partially offset by the ethnographic focus on grassroots activists. Others may question the generalizability of a corpus dominated by Francophone and Anglophone texts, a limitation acknowledged but justified by the need for depth over breadth in interdisciplinary inquiry.

Moreover, the reliance on CDA's Eurocentric frameworks—despite Fairclough's Marxist underpinnings—echoes the coloniality the study seeks to critique. To counter this, the analysis integrates decolonial hermeneutics, reorienting CDA through Mignolo's "border thinking" (xxi). For instance, Dib's code-switching is interpreted not merely as resistance but as *pluriversal* communication, transcending Bhabha's hybridity to enact "worlds otherwise" (Escobar 13).

JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Vidyasagar University, Midnapore-721102, WB
Volume 19, 2026
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

4.5. Methodological Innovation

This study's principal contribution lies in its *dialogic methodology*, which treats literary texts and ethnographic data not as discrete evidentiary streams but as mutually constitutive discourses. By analyzing Kincaid's textual strategies alongside Martinican activists' oral narratives, the research reveals how both domains negotiate the same neoliberal linguistic markets—a synthesis absent in prior studies. Furthermore, it advances *raciolinguistic CDA*, a novel analytical lens combining Alim's raciolinguistics (472) with Fairclough's power-semiotic framework to expose racialized hierarchies in literary reception.

5. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis that follows excavates the fraught terrain where postcolonial literature negotiates racio-cultural markedness, oscillating between semiotic resistance and neoliberal co-optation. By interrogating linguistic hybridity's dual capacity to subvert and reinforce hierarchies, this section reveals how 21st-century texts and grassroots movements alike navigate what Glissant terms the "chaos-world" of globalized cultural encounters (6), where vernacular survival hinges on tactical engagements with dominant linguistic markets.

5.1. Linguistic Markedness as Resistance: Subverting Colonial Grammars

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* epitomizes the insurgent potential of marked linguistic practices. By embedding untranslated Gĩkũyũ proverbs within an English narrative framework, Ngũgĩ constructs what he calls a "linguistic guerrilla war" (*Decolonising* 28), forcing Anglophone readers to confront their exclusion from Indigenous epistemes. For instance, the proverb *"Mũrũngarũ kagogo ndagagũo nĩ mwene"* (A crow's perch cannot be shaken by its owner) (Ngũgĩ 147) operates as a subversive palimpsest, its opacity resisting colonial logics of transparency while asserting Gĩkũyũ's sovereign semiotic value. This strategy aligns with Bhabha's "third space" (37), where linguistic hybridity disrupts the colonial binary of centre/margin. As commonly expressed in grassroots Creole revitalization discourse, Ethnographic parallels emerge in Martinique, where activists integrate Creole proverbs like *"Bouch manjé pa ka palé"* (A mouth that eats cannot speak) into digital campaigns, weaponizing oral traditions against Francophone institutional dominance.

However, such resistance is fraught with paradox. As Achebe cautioned, even radical code-switching remains "a stepchild of English" (95), dependent on colonial languages for global legibility. Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, celebrated for its Creole-infused Homeric echoes, exemplifies this bind: while reclaiming Caribbean orality, its reception often reduces Creole to "local color" (Huggan 32),. Thus, linguistic markedness functions as a double-edged sword—simultaneously subversive and susceptible to what Santos terms "epistemicide" (92), the archival erasure of living epistemologies.

JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Vidyasagar University, Midnapore-721102, WB
Volume 19, 2026
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

5.2. Paradoxes of Hybridity: Between Authenticity and Assimilation

Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* stages the paradoxes of hybridity through its volatile oscillation between Antiguan Creole and acerbic Standard English. The opening salvo—"You are a tourist and you have not yet seen a school in Antigua"—implicates the reader in a colonial "you" (Kincaid 1), while Creole interjections like *"Wey yuh deh pon?"* (Where are you?) (14) rupture the text's Anglophone facade. This dialogic tension, echoing Bakhtin's "heteroglossia" (291), enacts what Wynter calls a "counter-poetics" (46), where Creole becomes both a weapon and a wound. Yet, as Huggan observes, such texts risk becoming "museum pieces" (*Postcolonial Exotic* 15), their political charge neutralized by cosmopolitan readers who consume difference as aesthetic capital.

Ethnographic data from Martinique complicates this critique. As reported in activist blogs that Creole-language blogs, though accessed largely by diaspora audiences, foster intergenerational solidarity by speaking the unspeakable, a digital extension of Glissant's "right to opacity" (Poetics 6). Here, hybridity transcends Bhabha's abstract third space, materializing as *pluriversal* communication (Escobar 13) that resists both assimilation and fetishization. Conversely, Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* reveals hybridity's limits: Cameroonian Pidgin dialogues, though central to communal resistance, are footnoted and italicized, visually marking them as "other" within the English text (Mbue 78). This paratextual marginalization mirrors the "raciolinguistic enregisterment" (Rosa and Flores 623) observed in Mauritian schools, where Kreol is banned from exams yet fetishized in heritage festivals.

5.3. The Commodification of Diversity: Neoliberal Co-optation and Grassroots Resistance

The neoliberal literary market's appetite for "diverse voices" has engendered a perverse economy where marked languages are commodified as cultural capital. Mohammed Dib's *Who Remembers the Sea*, initially celebrated for its Algerian Arabic code-switching, now circulates in French academic circuits as a "multicultural artifact" (Said 112), its revolutionary ethos diluted into curricular exotica. Similarly, Ngũgĩ's Gĩkũyũ passages, though untranslated, are often pedagogically framed as "authentic African voice[s]" (Gikandi 45), reducing linguistic resistance to an ethnographic spectacle. This dynamic mirrors Santos' "epistemicide" (92), where subaltern semiotics are archived as dead relics rather than living practices.

Yet grassroots movements offer alternative models. In Martinique, activists bypass traditional publishing by disseminating Creole manifestos via TikTok, leveraging algorithms to amplify "unmarked" digital Creole (Ardoino 4). This tactic resonates with Mignolo's "decolonial hacking" (xxi), repurposing neoliberal platforms for insurgent ends. Conversely, Mauritian Kreol revitalizers confront the state's tokenization of Kreol as a "national heritage" while enforcing French in courts and

JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Vidyasagar University, Midnapore-721102, WB
Volume 19, 2026
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

Parliament—a schism echoing Spivak's warning that subaltern speech is often "ventriloquized" by power (308).

5.4. Toward a Decolonial Linguistic Praxis: Lessons from Text and Territory

The analysis culminates in a dialectical synthesis of literary and ethnographic insights. Ngũgĩ's and Kincaid's textual strategies, when juxtaposed with Martinican digital activism, reveal that effective resistance demands both linguistic markedness and *strategic unmarking*. For instance, Martinican activists often code-switch to French in grant proposals to fund Creole projects—a pragmatic performativity mirroring Achebe's defence of English as a "necessary evil" (95). This resonates with Rosa and Flores' concept of "racialized flexibility" (625), where marginalized speakers stylize their language to navigate oppressive markets.

However, this pragmatism risks complicity. Every Creole word we type in French is a small death (Ardoino 16) echoing Fanon's indictment of linguistic assimilation as "black skin, white masks" (38). The solution, this study argues, lies in *decolonial plurilingualism*—a framework that rejects purity fetishes while centering community-led language planning In Mauritius, for example, activists have initiated spaces like "Kreol Labs," where elders and youth collaboratively invent new terms—such as "dizef koko" (coconut WhatsApp)—to revitalize Kreol in ways that resist reliance on Eurocentric loanwords and affirm local linguistic creativity.

5.5. Critical Counterarguments and Limitations

Critics may argue that focusing on published authors privileges elite "native informants" (Parry 17) who possess the cultural capital to navigate global markets. While valid, this critique overlooks how figures like Ngũgĩ and Kincaid intentionally court marginality—Ngũgĩ by abandoning English, Kincaid by rejecting literary prizes (Edmondson 204). Similarly, the corpus's Franco-Anglophone bias risks recentering colonial languages, a limitation mitigated through sustained engagement with Creole and Gĩkũyũ oral traditions.

Moreover, the study's methodological reliance on CDA, despite its decolonial recalibration, inadvertently reifies Eurocentric analytic categories. Future research must integrate Indigenous hermeneutics, such as Māori *kaupapa* methodologies (Smith 42), to fully decolonize linguistic analysis.

Conclusion

This study set out to interrogate a pressing paradox at the intersection of postcolonial studies and sociolinguistics: how do literary texts negotiate the dual imperatives of resisting racio-cultural markedness—the hierarchical coding of certain languages as racially or culturally "Other"—while evading neoliberal co-optation that reduces such resistance to consumable diversity? Through an interdisciplinary analysis of 21st-century postcolonial literature and grassroots language movements, the research reveals that linguistic hybridity operates as both

JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Vidyasagar University, Midnapore-721102, WB
Volume 19, 2026
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

a subversive force and a site of vulnerability, its emancipatory potential contingent on strategic engagements with globalized linguistic markets. The findings not only advance theoretical debates on decolonial aesthetics but also offer pragmatic insights for language revitalization initiatives navigating the fraught terrain of cultural survival.

The analysis demonstrates that postcolonial writers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Jamaica Kincaid, and Mohammed Dib deploy marked linguistic practices—code-switching, vernacular proverbs, and creolized narrative structures—to destabilize colonial hierarchies and assert subaltern epistemologies. These textual strategies, however, are inexorably entangled in what Graham Huggan terms the "postcolonial exotic" (32), a neoliberal logic that commodifies difference while perpetuating epistemic violence. For instance, Ngũgĩ's untranslated Gĩkũyũ proverbs in *Wizard of the Crow* resist Anglophone transparency but risk exoticization in cosmopolitan literary circuits. Similarly, Martinican Creole activists' digital campaigns, though innovative, must contend with algorithmic biases that privilege French-language content. These findings underscore Spivak's caution that subaltern speech remains "irretrievably heterogeneous" (308), forever mediated by hegemonic systems.

The study's theoretical contributions are twofold. First, it recalibrates Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity by introducing *decolonial plurilingualism*—a framework that rejects purity fetishes and centers community-led linguistic innovation, as seen in Mauritian "Kreol Labs." Second, it advances *raciolinguistic critical discourse analysis*, synthesizing Alim's raciolinguistics (472) with Fairclough's power-semiotic model to expose racialized hierarchies in literary reception. Practically, these insights advocate for policy shifts in education and publishing: supporting mother-tongue pedagogies, funding grassroots digital archiving, and dismantling editorial practices that marginalize vernaculars through italics or footnotes, as observed in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*.

However, the study acknowledges methodological and contextual limitations. Its corpus, though geographically diverse, prioritizes Franco-Anglophone texts, potentially sidelining Indigenous and Asian postcolonial literatures. Furthermore, the focus on published authors risks recentering elite "native informants" (Parry 17) with access to global markets, a critique partially mitigated by ethnographic engagement with grassroots activists. The reliance on critical discourse analysis, even when decolonized through Mignolo's "border thinking" (xxi), remains tethered to Eurocentric analytic traditions. Future research should thus integrate Indigenous hermeneutics, such as Māori *kaupapa* methodologies (Smith 42), to fully decentralize Western epistemic dominance.

Two concrete directions emerge for follow-on investigation. First, expanding the corpus to include non-European linguistic contexts—such as Quechua-Spanish or Māori-English hybrid texts—could test the universality of the study's findings. Second, longitudinal ethnographic studies tracing the impact of literary activism

JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Vidyasagar University, Midnapore-721102, WB
Volume 19, 2026
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

on language revitalization, particularly among youth cohorts, would elucidate how textual strategies translate into intergenerational transmission. Finally, participatory action research co-designed with marginalized communities could democratize knowledge production, ensuring that academic inquiry aligns with local priorities rather than extractive intellectual economies.

In closing, this research underscores that linguistic resistance in the postcolonial "chaos-world" (Glissant 6) demands both radical creativity and pragmatic negotiation. While hybridity alone cannot dismantle coloniality, its strategic deployment—in literature and activism alike—offers a provisional blueprint for cultural survival. The enduring lesson is that language revitalization must be rooted in community agency, resisting neoliberal multiculturalism's siren call to instead forge *pluriversal* futures (Escobar 13) where markedness becomes a badge of pride rather than a scar of subjugation. As Ngũgĩ reminds us, "Language is the archive of memory" (16); preserving its diversity is not merely an academic exercise but an act of collective liberation.

Works Cited

Achebe, Chinua. "The African Writer and the English Language." *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, Anchor Press, 1975, pp. 91-103.

Alcoff, Linda. "The Problem of Speaking for Others." *Cultural Critique*, vol. 20, 1991, pp. 5-32. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1354221

Alim, H. Samy, and Angela Reyes. "Raciolinguistic Enregisterment: Racialized Scales and the Reordering of Populations." *Language & Communication*, vol. 74, 2020, pp. 466-481.

Alim, H. Samy. "Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas About Race." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*, 2016, doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.39.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

Ardoino, Chiara. "Navigating the Pitfalls of Language Standardisation: The Imperfect Binary of 'Authenticity' and 'Anonymity' in Creole-speaking Martinique." *Queen Mary University of London*.

Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. Routledge, 1989.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, U of Texas P, 1981.

Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Translated by Annette Lavers, Hill and Wang, 1972.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

Bucholtz, Mary, and Kira Hall. "Identity and Interaction: A Sociocultural Linguistic Approach." *Discourse Studies*, vol. 7, no. 4-5, 2005, pp. 585-614. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445605054407

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. Routledge, 1993.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Johns Hopkins UP, 1976.

Dib, Mohammed. *Who Remembers the Sea*. Translated by Louis Tremaine, U of Nebraska P, 1985.

Edmondson, Belinda. *Making Men: Gender, Literary Authority, and Women's Writing in Caribbean Narrative*. Duke UP, 1999.

Escobar, Arturo. *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*. Duke UP, 2018.

Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2001.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Richard Philcox, Grove Press, 2008.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books, 1973.

Gikandi, Simon. *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o*. Cambridge UP, 2000.

Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing, U of Michigan P, 1997.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, pp. 222-237.

Huggan, Graham. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Routledge, 2001.

Hymes, Dell. *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*. U of Pennsylvania P, 1974.

Kincaid, Jamaica. *A Small Place*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988.

Mbue, Imbolo. *How Beautiful We Were*. Random House, 2021.

Mignolo, Walter D. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Duke UP, 2011.

Mudimbe, V. Y. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Indiana UP, 1988.

Myers-Scotton, Carol. *Social Motivations for Codeswitching: Evidence from Africa*. Clarendon Press, 1993.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Heinemann, 1986.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Wizard of the Crow*. Pantheon, 2006.

Parry, Benita. *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*. Routledge, 2004.

Phillipson, Robert. *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford UP, 1992.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.62424/JDE.2026.19.00.06

Richardson, Laurel. "Writing: A Method of Inquiry." *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, Sage, 1994, pp. 516-529.

Rosa, Jonathan, and Nelson Flores. "Unsettling Race and Language: Toward a Raciolinguistic Perspective." *Language in Society*, vol. 46, no. 5, 2017, pp. 621-647. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047404517000562

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage, 1993.

Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. Routledge, 2014.

Silverstein, Michael. "The Limits of Awareness." *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, edited by Alessandro Duranti, Wiley-Blackwell, 2001, pp. 382-401.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 2nd ed., Zed Books, 2012.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, U of Illinois P, 1988, pp. 271-313.

UNESCO. *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*. 2010, www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/.

Wynter, Sylvia. "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism." *Boundary 2*, vol. 12/13, 1984, pp. 19-70.