

DISCOVERING AFRICAN LITERATURE IN THE NEW PRACTICAL ENGLISH AND THE GAMBIA ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

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Abstract

Once the African child is registered in school, at kindergarten or primary, he or she encounters an alien language, in a more formal setting and with a different approach. Much younger children spent a greater part of their time chanting nursery rhymes and songs. It is at primary school that children are introduced to the songs and rhymes. As the child discovers the written text, fables and folktales become the first form of literature they enjoy. By the end of the primary education, several texts, such as extracts of the translation of Charles Perrault's collection of stories, are accessible to the child. The system of exploitation differ depending on the approach used but by the time the child arrives at secondary level, some knowledge of literary texts is already acquired in preparation for a more elaborate study of the text. In the English language textbooks however, most of the texts are extracts from complete works. The choice of an extract is quite a challenging experience (except the poems surely). Novels, plays, poems as well as news stories are created for a different public other than for pedagogical purposes. These are therefore considered as authentic materials. The literary texts can be novels, short stories, plays, poems and all other works of literary production. For these English language textbooks, the most commonly used in The Gambia are *New Practical English*, *The Gambia English* and *English for the Senior Secondary schools*. *The Gambia English* is made for the Upper Basic level and *English for the Senior Secondary Schools* is designed, as the name indicates, for the senior secondary school. In this article we intend shows which texts the child discovers in the English language textbooks recommended for the secondary school level and demonstrate how this selection of literary texts evolved to provide a rich collection that has without doubt influenced both the linguistic and literary experiences of the Gambian child.

Our purpose would be to primarily explore the types and themes related to the selected texts and to relate that to the child. We will conclude by showing the presence or absence of Gambian works in these language textbooks.

Introduction

Language textbooks use texts, both literary and non-literary, to train the learners skills mainly in reading and writing. Children's literary books later referred to as children's literature, have served as the first textbooks for language learners.

The first recorded children's book was the hornbook. It is a piece of parchment or paper pasted on a wooden board and protected by a leaf of horn. Sometimes, hornbooks were created with other materials such as leather, ivory or even silver.

Between 1750 and 1800, John Newbery (1713-1767) issued the *Battledore* which was a term applied to cardboard or wooden tablets refined and used to teach children to read. This instrument, as it can best be described, resembles very closely the sort of slate or tablet (commonly called *alu'a*) used by the Koranic teachers and instructors to teach the memorisation of the Koran. Newbery is known to pioneer what can today be called the first children's literature book when he wrote, illustrated and published *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book Intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly* in around 1744.

The reprinting of the *New England Primer* in Boston by Ira Webster (1781-1859) in 1844 marked the beginning of not only the first religious books for children but also the most widely circulated schoolbook in the United States. With religious education as the central focus in the education system in most parts of the world in the 19th century, several other texts best described as Puritan literature for children grew. From James Janeway (1636-1674)'s *A Token for Children* (first published in 1672 and republished for circulation in 1830), to John Bunyan (1628-1688)'s *Divine Emblems* (first published in 1686 and republished in 1791), and finally to Isaac Watt (1674-1748)'s *Devine Songs* illustrated by Thomas Bewick (1810), literature for children was meant to inculcate morals and religious values. Later, authors of such form of literature were called Moralists.

The coming of chapbooks revolutionised the textbook's usage and access. They contained popular literature and were circulated by peddlers or 'chapmen' and sold at derisory prices. Thanks to the chapbook, the first popular tales, novellas, ballads and rhymes (*Jack the Giant Killer, Tom Thumb, The House that Jack Built*), fables and folktales (*The Fables of Aesop*) became accessible and popular. *Robinson Crusoe, Don Quixote* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* first appeared in chapbook form before they were republished into books. What rendered the chapbook attractive in the later part were the excellent illustrations.

Illustrations have always been significant in children's literature. To have excellent children's books in the 18th and 19th centuries therefore, illustrators were indispensable. Several authors had to get their works illustrated by endowed illustrators, but several authors were themselves both excellent writers and illustrators. George Cruikshank (1792-1878) turned out to be the most brilliant artist and illustrator of children's books of his time. He illustrated Dickens and the Brothers Grimm. His illustrations were of such an excellent quality that critics referred to them as the finest etchings done since Rembrandt. William Blake (1757 – 1827) was a poet, painter, engraver, and he wrote and illustrated his works all by himself. Though he produced a limited number of books surely due to the effort and energy he put in for his drawings, he produced some of the best-illustrated books of his time.

The Language Textbook

If it is etymologically a handy work for easy consultation, counsel and instruction, its definition is then restricted to such works as practical guides, instruction manuals or recipe books. The dictionary of Petit Robert defines a textbook as '*a didactic textbook presenting, in a maniable format, the essential notions of a science, of a technic and particularly knowledge required by the school syllabus*' (Rey, Robert and Rey-Debove 1967). It is therefore necessarily manageable, in size and in weight (Gérard and Xavier 1999, 11). It is specifically conceived for school usage and meant for learning purposes. It serves as support in a specific

area of study (16). The language textbook is, above all, ‘beyond the boundaries of the syllabus, to promote a system of values, of an ideology, of a culture’ (19). A textbook should be properly and well-conceived for, even though it serves as support material, for many, it is the only means through which they are exposed to other cultures of writing and, there then, to a social promotion which plays a significant role in mental development (23).

Through the texts in a language textbook, as well as the examples, the images, the text titles, creeps, after all, the identity of a nation (19). The choice of texts has thus remained an arduous exercise for the editors and authors of language textbooks.

The Gambia government, despite numerous modifications in its system of education between 1970 and 2003, has favoured *The Practical French* and *The Practical English* textbooks that were later reedited to *New Practical French* and *New Practical English* respectively. *The Gambia English* and *English for the Senior Secondary Schools* were later produced to respond to the new system of education and the national curriculum.

The literary text in the language textbook

Analysing the literary texts in the language textbooks first calls for a definition of what a literary text is. What criteria determine that a text is literary? How can a literary text be distinguished from a non-literary text? Jean Michel Adam, during a presentation at a colloquium, said :

[...] to be interpreted as a text, a series of enunciations should not only appear in the form of a sequence of units linked, but also as a sequence progressing towards an end (1988, 73).

A text is not only a collection of sentences unless these sentences are linked and form a progression towards an expected. Adam underlined two important points in his conclusion : *the cohesion – sequential progression and the cohesion – pragmatic pertinence’ (Adam 1988, 80).*

Daniel Bergez, on the other hand, identified three pillars in his definition of what a literary text is: the author, the historical and the aesthetic dimensions (Bergez 1996, 13). He further argued that the text is an artwork where authors sign their names and are involved in the destiny of their works. The text becomes identified in time and space; it represents a sensation, and, in parallel, the science of the beautiful. Mario Klarer, in her book *An Introduction to Literary Studies*, buttressed on that when she wrote, ‘*The word text is related to “textile” and can be translated as “fabric”: just as single threads form a fabric, so words and sentences form a meaningful and coherent text*’ (2004, 1). Klarer warned however that the origin of the words helps little in their definitions but they should rather be associated to their cultural and historical phenomena as well as their production and reception.

In the textbooks however, most of the texts are extracts from complete works. The choice of an extract is quite a challenging experience (except the poems surely). Bergez explains that the short text, found in general within the school textbook, is chosen to serve a specific purpose; to answer ‘*to the need for explanation but in return it imposes it as a dominant practice*’ (Bergez 1996, 13). These extracts in the textbooks were to have been their own completed works, from Bergez’s viewpoint, and through the use of flashbacks and prior explanations by the teacher, justice is rendered to the text from which the extracts came and constrains related to the extract are easily alleviated.

Inventory and Classification of texts in the Language textbook.

The inventory and classification of texts can only be effective if we restrict ourselves to the major textbooks in English taught in the schools using the national curriculum. We have therefore set ourselves the following criteria of choice of the textbooks to analyse:

- The most commonly used textbooks covering the period our analysis covers;
- The West African Examination Council recommended English language textbooks;

- The Gambia Government recommended textbooks for junior and senior secondary schools.

The English Language Textbooks

The most commonly used English language textbooks are the *New Practical English*, *The Gambia English* and *English for the Senior Secondary schools*. *The Gambia English* is made for the Upper Basic level¹ and *English for the Senior Secondary Schools* is designed, as the name indicates, for the Senior secondary school level.

The *Practical English* textbooks are the first versions of the *New Practical English* used in the schools. Though many things remained the same, the authors were careful to readapt the new format to respond to the curriculum of the learners under the revised education systems. The authors, P. A. Ogundipe and P. S. Tregidgo, from the little we were able to gather, are Ghanaian English teachers and grammar specialists. The textbook is published by Longman.

Macmillan also came up with an English textbook for junior and secondary schools: the *Gambia English* and *English for the Senior Secondary Schools*. David Cobb² of Macmillan is the main author of these two English textbooks. To suit each country in Africa, Cobb developed the books with a team of English specialists from each country. In the revised editions of the *The Gambia English*, the panel members selected to readapt the content to The Gambia were Mr Ibrahima Touray (coordinator), Mrs Ebrima Foon Sarr (Curriculum Research and Development Centre), Mrs Yvette Phillott (Gambia College), Mrs Grace Ogoh (Bakau New Town Primary), Reverent Sahr Junisa (Gambia High School), Mr Ebrima Jarjou (Serrekunda Primary School), Mrs Claudiana Cole³ (Marakissa Primary School) and Mrs Sally Grant (Albion Primary School). One of their tasks was to contextualise the scenes and the

¹ The Basic Cycle is a 9-year education for the child which is expected to allow every child to get a strong foundation before going to secondary school.

² We could find nothing of David Cobb despite our extensive research.

³ At the time of submitting this paper, she is the Minister of Basic and Secondary Education

classroom created texts to give them a Gambian feel. The Panel in the English for Gambian Senior Senior Secondary Schools comprised of Juliette Lawson (University of The Gambia), Yvette Phillot, and Momodou Lamin Saho Sambou (University of The Gambia). The same method is applied to the same book for other African countries such as Sierra Leone and Ghana. For example, *New Way English* and *The Gambia English* are both the same book with different titles.

New Practical English

The first edition of this textbook was published in 1985. The *New Practical English* became widely used and very successful in Anglophone West Africa. The Basic Cycle system in the five West African Anglophone countries brought along the *New Practical English*, which, in the former system of education was entitled *Practical English*. The two authors made significant efforts to respond to the needs of the learners. This textbook, published by the Longman Group Ltd since 1985 is directed to students in the Upper Basic or Junior Secondary schools and the Senior Secondary Schools.

The *New Practical English* is in six books, taking the learner through the Junior to the Senior secondary schools. During the period of the three years spent in the Junior school, the child discovers numerous extracts from books of adventure and science, autobiographies and historical narratives and from fables and short stories.

The junior secondary school section features 52 authors comprising of 24 African authors and 28 European authors. Of the African authors, 12 are Nigerian and the others are 3 Ghanaians, 2 Cameroonians, 2 Kenyans, and one from each of the following countries: Sierra Leone, Uganda, South Africa and Eritrea. An African author, believed to be Kenyan, Tunde Aiyebusi, is considered here as East African as no specific information of the author is known. Twenty-eight non-Africans have their works presented in this textbook. 24 are British and the remaining four are from the Netherlands, Germany and France.

Among the most prominent African authors are Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, Ngugi Wa’Thiongo and the francophone writer, Mongo Beti. Jonathan Swift, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jules Verne⁴ and Daniel Defoe are authors whose works have been used as literature in the English Literature syllabus. It is of interest to note that several foreign authors are featured particularly francophone authors.

The texts are all comprehension passages derived from novels, newspapers, magazines, short story collections and anthologies, autobiographies, biographies and scientific journals. In our analysis below, we concentrate on the typology, the frequency and the general theme of the texts used for the comprehension passages.

The Gambia English and English for the Senior S. Schools

Following a change in the education system in the Anglophone West African countries in the early eighties, and with the adoption of the new system of progression, the 6-3-3-2⁵ system, the National Curriculum required new books in the schools. In this light, the Macmillan Publishers took the initiative to create and publish *The Gambia English* and the *English for Gambian Senior Secondary schools* to respond to the new curriculum.

This new English textbook, first published in 1992, presents interesting features related to the exploitation of the text. In the first three years corresponding to the Upper Basic level, the student encounters the two types of texts: the authentic and the classroom created texts. One easily notices the volume of classroom created texts in contrast to the authentic texts, which gradually diminishes as the student progresses towards the senior classes. From grades 10 to 12, the English for the Gambian SSS presents a volume of authentic texts, which gradually

⁴ A French writer and author of *Round the World in Eighty Days* and other science fiction stories.

⁵ Which later became 6-3-3, gave each child a 9-year uninterrupted basic education and 3 years of secondary education.

increases, and the classroom created texts reduce are less featured. This could probably explain the effort to introduce literature and the techniques of literary studies as early as Grade 10.

Varieties and typology of short stories

Where a story narrates a metamorphosis, a supernatural being or a magical object, it is considered fantasy stories. In Book 1 of the *New Practical English*, several short stories are used for text exploitation. In Unit 5 of the first term, the students encounter a text entitled ‘The Hunter and the Magic Garden’ (Ogundipe and Tregidgo 1985). This is a story of a hunter who accidentally finds himself in a garden with two sorts of plants: one transforms to a donkey and the other retransforms back to human form. It is an extract of a German story and has a short introduction to the story. Such types of stories are largely inspired from Perrault, Grimm and Andersen⁶ (Popet and Bredel 2000, 11). Other stories of fantasy are ‘Kamigani finds her Husband’, ‘The Land of Giants’, ‘The Hunter and the Magic Garden’, ‘Meleager and the Burning Wood’, ‘The Valley of Diamonds’, ‘Kiumi the Giant Killer’ and ‘Anguza and the Lake God’.

‘Why Babies Can’t Talk’ is the first text in Book 1 of the *New Practical English* for Junior secondary schools. It is an etiological story in that it tries to give an explanatory narration of a natural cause: the reason why babies cannot talk. These stories give an insight of the real and the fiction for the child and later help it distinguish the two (Popet and Bredel 2000, 11). These are stories that are common in folklore and are purely fictional. Other stories under this category in this textbook are ‘Why We Have Both Day and Night’, ‘The Dog and the Leopardess’, ‘The Magician and the Birds’ and ‘The Dogs and the Hunter’. The story ‘Why We Have Both Day and Night’ is self-explanatory. The next three stories cited explain how the

⁶ Charles Perrault (French), the Grimm Brothers (German), and Hans Christian Andersen (Danish) are masters of storytelling particular fables and folktales. The Grimm Brothers published *Household Tales* in which figures the famous ‘Hansel and Gretel’

leopard has its spots, how some birds lost their sweet voices and how dogs have stopped trusting humans respectively.

For a story of mischief, the second text, 'The Seven Proud Sisters', fits the description perfectly. Seven proud sisters declared that only someone who discovers their names could marry them. Despite their parents' warning, they insisted on this character until a turtle, using a cunning strategy, discovers their names. They were then forced to accept the outcome of their folly. Generally, stories of mischief are meant to make fun but sometimes they also serve to ridicule the rich and certain social values.

Animals are the most common characters told in fables, tales, folktales, and fairy tales. Such stories called animal stories are difficult to place specifically. In both cartoons and most children stories, animals have become the lead characters (Brer Rabbit and the Butter, the Dog and the Leopard), shared characters with humans (The Seven Proud Sisters, the Dogs and the Hunter) or impersonated humans. In the 'Lioncub and the River', the animals have played their own animal role except that they are given voices but in Brer Rabbit and the Butter⁷, the rabbit is in human cloths, acts human and behaves human. In *Aesop's Fables* and *La Fontaine*, the stories are principally animals, and they illustrate morality at the end. Beatrix Potter⁸, Lewis Carroll⁹ and Rudyard Kipling¹⁰ are also examples of authors who have used animals in their children's literature.

⁷ Stories created by the American writer, Joel Chandler Harris in the late 19th century and published in several collections called the *Uncle Remus Stories*.

⁸ She was an English writer who illustrated and secretly published her first animal story entitled *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* in 1900. since she has published several others and became famous for it.

⁹ The author of *Alice in Wonderland*

¹⁰ He is author of the famous *The Jungle Book* which is Tarzan like. Kipling was a British born in India and raised there. There are reflections of his Indian background in his stories.

The last variety of short stories in Book 1 is the legend. Three stories correspond to this description: ‘Water Spirits’, ‘Morgan’s Evil Magic’ and ‘Sir Tristram and Sir Breunor’¹¹. The last two are well known myths called the Arthurian tales.

Title	Genre
Brer Rabbit and the Butter	Animal story
The Lion-cub and the River	Animal story
Why Babies Can’t Talk	Etiological story
Why we have both Day and Night	Etiological story
The Dog and the Leopardess	Etiological story
The Magician and the Birds	Etiological story
The Dogs and the Hunter	Etiological story
The Seven Proud Sisters	Mischievous
Kamigani finds her Husband	Fantasy
The Land of Giants	Fantasy
The Hunter and the Magic Garden	Fantasy
Meleager and the Burning Wood	Fantasy
The Valley of Diamonds	Fantasy
Kiumi the Giant Killer	Fantasy
Anguza and the Lake God	Fantasy
Water Spirits	Legend
Morgan’s Evil Magic	Legend
Sir Tristram and Sir Breunor	Legend

Extracts from children’s novels

Using literary extracts in language textbooks or an introduction to literature for the junior and senior secondary schools without including extracts from a selection of children’s literature would certainly be preposterous. These extracts may be destined mainly for language purposes, but children derive pleasure in reading them too. That part of it is what interests us under this section. Most language textbooks today, particularly those adopting the new methods of teaching such as the Communicative approach, hardly use literary texts. In

¹¹ *The adventures of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table* are a British legend that has for long been recounted. Both French and British writers wrote King Arthurs adventures and therefore some of the versions have slight differences

most cases, texts are derived from non-literary but authentic texts mostly from journals, magazines, newspapers, public announcements, etc. Other texts are classroom-created and respond to the needs of the authors.

Several novels used in the selected textbooks under study are classified as children’s literature. Of the extracts used, fifteen are identified and classified as children’s literature. We were able to classify them as children and detective stories, children and school, children and adventure, the imaginary and the fantasy, hunt for treasure. Other forms we will equally put under the loop are biographies and autobiographies, science and science fiction, and war stories.

The Child as a detective

One form of children’s literature is detective stories where the main characters are mainly children. Detective stories do not have to be adult boring stories of detection but those of adventure with a lot of suspense and danger and in which the child hero successfully uncovers the secret or stops the bad people on time. The child hero does not necessarily have the permission or the expertise to indulge into detection and that tinge of danger makes the story very closely related to the child reader. It brings out in the child reader that adventure he or she craves for and that unique desire to want to do something for once without having to have an adult decide what to do best.

The *New Practical English* presents several extracts from a selection of children detective stories. Among these are a British, an Eritrean, a German and a Ghanaian.

Book title	Author(s)	Nationality
David and the Gangsters	Timothy Dickson	British
Adamu & the Stolen Child	Yar Kunama	Eritrean
Emil & the Detectives	Erich Kastror	German
Salifu, the Detective	C. J. Neville	Ghanaian

The Child at school

School life goes along with the child's development and children experience much of their adolescent and adult lives within or around the school. In most books where children play the hero, there is some element of the school and it either becomes the main setting of the story or part of the general setting.

Most African writers in the sixties wrote with children as their hero. Some of the stories were semi-autobiographical (Camara Laye's *The African Child* or *Black Boy*, Cheick Hamidou Kane's *The Ambiguous Adventure*) and they had the school as the main setting. The extracts in the *New Practical English* have several stories within the confines of the school.

Book title	Author(s)	Nationality
Sani Goes to School	Umaru Ladan & Michael Crowder	Nigerian/ British
Eze Goes to School	Onuora Nzekwu and Michel Crowder	South African/ British
Tales out of school	Nkew Nwankwo	Nigerian
The Undesirable Element	Mohammed Sule	Nigerian

Martha Robinson noted:

School life has always been a passionate interest to the young reader, starting way back with Tom Brown's Schooldays, through the innumerable boarding schools for girls by Angela Brazil and her followers, to the more glamorous and outstandingly successful ballet books by Noel Streatfield, and on to books about our comprehensive schools (48).

Stories around the school are also closely linked to the realities of the child. Family stories can also be linked to stories around the school, as is the case with *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, *The Undesirable Element* by Muhamed Sule and *Patience is Accompanied by a Smile* by Ebou Gaye. With school life also comes adventures of different kinds be it within or outside the school.

The Child in adventure

The extracts from the *New Practical English*, *The Gambia English* and *English for the Senior Secondary Schools* provide a plethora of stories either directly or indirectly demonstrating an adventurous experience. Some of these might not necessarily be suitable reading at that age, such as *African Flying Doctor* by Jeff Baker or *Roots* by Alex Hailey, but children grow up quickly and any adventure, if well written to captivate the reader, would be suitable for the child. Seen in a different angle, adventure is too general that it encompasses several other specific themes, such as: science fiction (*Journey to the Centre of the Earth* by Jules Verne and *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift), historical narrations (*Dangerous Journeys* by Leonard Roe and *Brazilian Adventure* by Peter Fleming) and autobiographies (*An African Abroad* by Olabisi Ajala and *Up From Slavery* by Booker Washington).

Apart from the first book of *New Practical English for the Senior Secondary Schools*, none of the other books presented their stories in a thematic manner. One wonders why such a style was not pursued in the subsequent books.

Young readers enjoy reading strange phenomena and suspense, particularly in adventure. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis present extraordinary adventures full of magic and suspense. Other writers who have skilfully married adventure and fantasy or magic are J.R.R. Tolkien's books *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*, and J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. These are stories where children find themselves as heroes, adventurers that raise them to the belief.

The *New Practical English* presents several stories related to adventure and fantasy, but *The Gambia English* does seem to emphasise more on adventure than on fantasy. Most of the adventure stories in the latter evolve around contemporary stories and very few classic adventure stories are selected.

The imaginary and the fantasy

The editors of *The Good Book Guide to Children's Books* (Taylor and Braithwaite 1986) declare, “*the crowning glory of children's books is fantasy*”. Defining fantasy could be challenging, as several dictionaries would provide similar definitions with marked differences. Suffice to say that fantasy comes from the imaginary. Children love to travel in dreamland and imagination, escaping the real world. *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland* presents just that. Though rabbits and midgets are not extraordinary beings, the world in which Alice was plunged, makes the story an extraordinary story. Talking of extraordinary beings, today several stories have captured the attention of children and adults alike. The stories of Harry Potter and his adventures through a school of magic make the series an excellent dose of fantasy. Since Harry Potter was featured on the big screen, one notices several other fantasy stories brought to the screen such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Lord of the Rings*.

In *Fantasy and Nemesis: Response to Reality in Western Literature* by Kathryn Hume, the notion of fantasy is elaborated in depth and such a notion as an approach to literature extensively argued. However, despite what critics may advance, fantasy remains one of the most successful forms of literature that continues to be appealing to young readers. Many of the extracts, particularly in the *New Practical English*, have some form of fantasy. *The Gambia English* does not give much interest in fantasy as the *New Practical English* does.

Biographies and autobiographies

The New Practical English presents a rich collection of texts derived from biographies and autobiographies of renowned people of different generations and different histories. The senior secondary school student discovers extracts from autobiographies such as *Black Boy* by Richard Wright, *Ghana, the Autobiography of Kwame Nkruma* by Kwame Nkruma, *Thinking With You* by Tai Solarin and *Iron* by Obafemi Awolowo. Other authors who have shared biographies are Richard Pankhurst with *Tarikh*, John Canning with *100 Great Lives*, and C.T. Binns with *The Last Zulu King: Life and Death*

of Ceyswayo and Stanlake Samkange with *On Trial for My Country*. Some autobiographies have had a mixture of fiction and reality for this is what features in most autobiographies. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is an excellent example of such an autobiography. Similarly, the story of the Kinteh dynasty has so much detail to lead speculations as to its authenticity. As Forster made clear, however, autobiography or not, once it makes good reading, it is a story. In reference to *War and Peace*, he stated that:

After one has read War and Peace for a bit, great chords begin to sound, and we cannot exactly say what struck them. [...] They come from the immense area of Russia, over which episodes and characters have been scattered, from the sum-total of bridges and frozen rivers, forests, roads, gardens, fields, which accumulate grandeur and sonority after we have passed them. (Forster 1927, 26-27)

What it all infers is that the good story in the biography or the autobiography rests with the style of the writer and the art of storytelling. A good biography or autobiography need not present a flat story such as Forster gave as an example, 'The king died and then the queen died'. There the plot becomes missing, and a story is not told. However, 'The king died, and then the queen died of grief' (Forster 1927, 60) makes a plot, weak or not, because there is something to narrate.

The Gambia English and the *English for the Senior Secondary Schools* have also presented several biographies and autobiographies: *The African Child* by Camara Laye, *An African in Greenland* by Tété-Michel Kpomassie and *Ambiguous Adventure* by Cheikh Hamidou Kane.

Science and science fiction

Numerous texts on science have been introduced by the editors of the *New Practical English* for both the upper basic and the secondary levels. Science can be fascinating as it leads

to discoveries. Children enjoy discoveries because they travel in the realm of the unknown. Today, science has developed into another passion, a passion for the unknown and the dangerous. The success of the movies on science, scientific discoveries have gathered more audiences than has ever been the case in history. For instance, the Indiana Jones adventures, the *King Solomon's Mines* and a host of other scientific discoveries based on fiction carry both adventure and curious discoveries.

Science has gone beyond the imagination of the simple discovery to the more complex and imaginary domain called science fiction. Not only are authors depicting the strange and the impossible in both books and films, but they are also being very imaginative of worlds beyond the real and impossible. Comic characters have proven that children love science fiction. Which child would not love to be Spiderman and spin a web right from their palms at the tender age of five? How many adults would not steal a glance at Flash Gordon, Dr Who, Superman, Daredevil or Hellboy comics?

With the first Isaac Asimov science fiction, though more suited for adults than for children, the pace was set for the imaginative and the impossible. Children love to be lost in that strange world where adults have no place and where anything can be possible: heroism, danger, love and the impossible.

Most of the short stories have some elements of science fiction in them. Books like *Gulliver's Travels* and *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* are fitting examples. However, as the student moves to the higher classes, these stories will be dropped for extracts from newspapers and magazines.

War stories

War stories have fascinated children since the aftermath of the Second World War. These stories generally centre on a family or a group of people going through war and surviving either miraculously or by sheer luck. Wars are not about guns and bombs alone. Shakespeare

plays generally evolve around war and unrest within either rich families or clans. Some detective stories can be categorised here as they present warlike danger such as *Emil and the Detectives* by Erich Kästner. C. S. Lewis' book on *Narnia*, J.R.R Tolkien's *Lord of the Ring*, and *King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table* by Roger Lanczy Green are all stories of heroism amid wars and destruction. Commenting on her book *A House of Their Own*, Martha Robinson says:

The war has brought shortages of food and goods to every one of every class: we were all up against realities and a spirit of materialism was born in a wide swing away from the idealism of patriotic fervour that had carried us all through the war. It seeped slowly through to the younger generation and endangered restlessness and rebellion. Behaviour changed, tastes in play, in entertainment, in reading changed. Everything had to have more excitement. Peace was so dull!
(Robinson 1982, 60)

War stories are also like initiations for children for that is when most of them discover themselves and establish their identity. It remains to say that war stories, however violent or shocking, continue to attract children's interest in reading particularly because wars continue to rage on in some parts of the world and remain a contemporary theme.

Conclusion

We hope to attain, in this part, an insight of the texts in the language textbooks through the inventory, the analysis and the comparison. Our research has shown several interesting findings:

The New Practical English

At the junior secondary level, the earlier books started with short stories and folktales. We find this as a good strategy to incite learners to want to read and enjoy reading. The stories are, as our analysis have shown, mainly derived from fantasy and folklore most of which learners have already started discovering at the primary (or the lower basic) level. Gradually, as the learner advances in using the books, these stories are derived from books of adventure, myth and children's stories. At the upper stage of the upper basic level, learners come to discover African authors and authentic texts derived from science journals and magazines as well as cultural discovery from extracts of articles.

This is a manifest that the authors have had a carefully strategized criterion of choice of texts. For instance, the earlier stories are complete texts while the later ones are extracts. We have discussed the effects of extracts and research has shown that extracts are only interesting if there is a flashback or an explanation from the teacher regarding the said story. In most cases this does not happen, yet the authors of these textbooks have given more consideration of this and have included the necessary paratext to help students. In the earlier texts, one notices either an introduction to the text or an iconography that gives a context or an insight to the text.

At the senior secondary school level, the presentation of texts takes a different form. In Book 1 for example the texts are separated by terms and each term has a specific theme. This gives the teacher the possibility to explore other texts under the same theme, particularly those texts that are closely related to the context of the learner.

Another interesting factor is the extracts derived from great authors like Charles Dickens, George Orwell and Wole Soyinka. Though these are extracts, the authors can always be explored outside class under the advice of their teacher.

In Book 2, the termly separation was abandoned though but one can discover a thematic strategy in the choice of the texts. Through the second year in the secondary school, learners discover important people through biographies and autobiographies. War, taxation, immigration and polygamy would become major subjects as well as other sociocultural and socioeconomic issues. Very few literary extracts can be found at this stage but several renowned authors, such as Buchi Emecheta, Chinua Achebe and Richard Wright.

In Book 3, more extracts from magazines and journals will feature at this level. Some of these magazines and journals are Lagos Guardian, Sunday Tribune and National Concord. Several authors will be cited here too.

In all the texts for senior secondary schools, there are introductions and images to support the text. One other observation is that most of the texts are by Nigerian authors and journalists. There are no plays, no poems and no classroom-created texts. Learners therefore have to depend on their literature lessons to discover poetry and plays.

The Gambia English and English for the Senior Secondary Schools

This method comes with the new system of education (6-3-3) and therefore presents a new approach to teaching language. The chief editor, David Cobb, created this method for Macmillan Education publishers and the textbook is targeted for learners in Africa. To have it contextualised for The Gambia, which is a small market to Macmillan, local specialists in language were selected to change the names and places.

The Gambia English presents both authentic and classroom-created texts. From the first day, the learner discovers prose fiction, poetry and drama. The nature of the text selections has shown that there are more classroom-created texts in the early stages and less of that in the later stages. Included in the textbooks for Grades 7-9 are newspaper extracts (both authentic and classroom-created) and comic strips.

At the senior level, a new stage under every unit, Focus on Literature, makes it possible for learners to discover literary expressions. However, this does not give the learner the techniques to enjoy reading. On the contrary, learners are only acquainted with literary jargon such as imagery, alliteration, onomatopoeia and simile, which only complicates the enjoyment of reading literature. Another included aspect is songs.

New Practical French

The new practical French, though not studied in this article, starts introducing literature at the fourth year, which corresponds to Form 5 of the old system of education. In The first three years, the learner enjoys French through numerous classroom-created dialogues revolving around the Mba family with Kemba and Amalia as the principal protagonists. The learner is made to enjoy the basic daily experiences of these two kids both in school and around school. The first three books also present songs, African adages and proverbs. Books 4 and 5 begin to present several extracts of francophone African authors.

The other included aspects are African proverbs, adages and songs. The authors' represented are mainly those who wrote against colonialism and their works can best be classified as resistant literature.

Observations

From all that we have seen so far, Gambian literature does not seem to figure in any of the textbooks under study and the others not studied here.

Cobb makes his textbooks contextualised but the argument that seems to come up is, has any Gambian literature been included in the textbook. Unfortunately, the misconception is that The Gambia has little or no significant literature, or if there is any, the country is not economically viable to have a whole textbook created for it alone.

This is why most of the authors hardly reflect any Gambian literature in their textbooks.

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