Language Mixing in Eugene O'Neill's Play 'The Emperor Jones'

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Abstract: *This paper on 'Language Mixing in Eugene O'Neill's play 'The Emperor Jones' deals with mixing of two languages namely Black English and African American English. If one uses a language and mixed words, phrases and sentences from other usages is called as code-mixing. It is used to describe changes at the word level, when one or two words change in a sentence. In this play Eugene O'Neill described distinctive uses of same language according to the social group. It has various forms of language such as slang, colloquial and informal group. The language of Negroes called 'Black English' is used in 'The Emperor Jones'. It has been variously named as 'Negro Non Standard English', 'Negro dialect', and 'African American English'. This dialect shares many features with other kinds of English. The features associated with this dialect are found on Standard English while they speak. The languages mixed in this play are namely Black British English, African American English, Slang, Colloquial and also low varieties of the language have been mixed.*

Language Mixing in 'The Emperor Jones'

Eugene O'Neill's 'The Emperor Jones' is an expressionistic play and the characters are less. All the characters belong to the group of Negroes, except Smithers. Smithers is a low class British Cockney Trader. His language is slightly different from the language of Negroes. It has code mixing of words from the dialects of British English and African English. Mixing of two languages can be seen in his speech. The natives and the ruler uses colorless, colloquial English which is the day-to-day language of Negroes exposed to the alien English culture.

Use of British Informal and Black English

Smithers (tightening his grasp roughly) Easy! None o'that me birdie. You can't wriggle out now. I got me 'ooks on yer.

Birdie – British informal word meant 'a little bird'. The pronunciation, deletion of consonants 'f' and 'l' in 'o' and 'ooks and the change of first person singular 'my' for 'me' exposes it is Black English.

Smithers – yes, yer turned the bleedin' trick, all right. Blimey, I have never seen a bloke 'as' ad the bloomin' luck you 'as'. The British informal expressions 'Blimey' and 'Bloke' meant for fellow person. The loss of consonants /g/ in the final position, /h/ in the initial position, bloomin' bleedin' 'as' belongs to Black English.

Smithers nationality is British and he lives in low class society. So he uses British informal words and language of low variety. This is because he had been lived with Negroes for many years. An extreme form of informality in the use of a language is called 'slang'. Slang has a legitimate place in the linguistic repertoire of speech communities. Smithers language has the mixing of slang words.

Smithers – Ow! So that's the ticket! Well I know bloody well, wot the air – when they runs to the 'ills. The tom-tom 'ill be jumping out there bloomin' soon ….. Gawd Blimey! I only 'opes I'm there when they takes 'im out to shoot 'im (suddenly).'E's still 'ere all right, ain't 'e?

(i) Use of Slang

Ticket – meant for right thing, in order to obtain something. It is an American slang.

(ii) Use of Negro Dialect

The usage like ain't, and words 'im, 'e show the low variety of English language.

(iii) Use of Slang and British Informal

Smithers – (trying to force a laugh) I was on'y spoofin' yer. Can't yer take a joke? And you was just sayin' you'd never been in jail. The word spoofin' is an informal British dialect. The meaning is an imitation of something in which its characteristics features are exaggerated for comic effects,

Smithers – (He guffaws loudly) Blimey, but they're balmy as 'ell. Balmy is slang expression for 'ell. Some examples for language use in low class society from the play is given in the table below.

Negro dialect	Standard English
No tell him, Mister!	Don't tell him, Sir!
You no hit	Do not hit me
Him sleep after eat	He fell asleep, after lunch
Me old woman	I am an old woman
No, me no steal	No, I don't steal
They go-all go	They have all gone
Me left only	I alone was left
Nix on that old sailing ship stuff	Switch on that old sailing ship.
Look out fur yuself	Look out for your own interests
Dat's a fac	That is a fact

Code mixing of slang usages and African American English by Brutus Jones and Old Lem' has been taken from their few dialogues. They are:

Use of Slang and Black English

Brutus Jones (with a grin) De long green, dat's me every time! (Then rebukingly) But you ain't got no kick agin me, I'se paid you back all you done for me many times. Long green – slang expression for paper-money

The ungrammatical usage of I'se – I am of African English. The double negative sentence is also one of the characteristics of Black English. 'you ain't got no kick agin me.'

Brutus Jones. I knows you'se seared to steal from me. On'y I ain't 'lowin'nary body to touch dis baby, she's my rabbit's foot. 'Baby' and 'Rabbit's foot' are the slang expressions. 'Baby'- the youngest of the group. He is using this word for the silver bullet. Because it was the last-moulded (youngest) of all the bullets in the chamber.

'Rabbit's foot'- the word 'rabbit' is the American slang. It means to run away, especially in a cowardly manner and hide.

Use of Slang

Brutus Jones. Well, den I hoofs it. Feet, do yo' duty. I hoofs it –I will get away on foot. The word 'hoof' which is properly applied to cattle, is a slang expression for human foot.

Brutus Jones-my goodness, look at dem woods, will you? Dat no count Smithers said dey'd be black an' he sho' called de tum. 'called de tum' is American slang and it means to solve a problem or to identify a criminal.

Use of Informal Words and Slang

Brutus Jones – I'se hungry, I's! I <u>gotta</u> git my feed. Whar's my strength <u>gonna</u> come from it I doesn't? Gorry, I gotta find dat <u>grub</u> high an' low somehow! It is a best example of code mixing of informal low dialect, slang and African American English. This informal words 'gotta' and 'gonna' are used. Gotta – have to Gonna – Going to Slang – 'Grub' for food. The ungrammatical usages such as I'se hungry,' I' is showing the mingling of Black English.

Brutus Jones. Oh, Lawd, On'y de silver one left- an' I gotta save dat for' luck. If I shoots dat on I'm goner sho'! The word **'goner'** is a slang and its meaning is completely ruined. The pronunciation of 'Lawd' for 'Lord' is the feature of African English.

Use of Negro Dialect

The language used by Lem is fully a Negro dialect and his dialect is similar to Negro woman. The ungrammatical sentences are the best example for use of Negro dialect. Some examples for this dialect are taken from the play and given in the table below.

African American English	Standard American English
Him dead	He is dead
My mens dey got 'um silver bullets	My mens possess silver bullets
Dey kill him shore	They have surely killed him
Lead bullets no kill him	Lead bullets could not have killed him
He got um strong charm	He possess a strong charm against them
I cookum money	I got them silver coins melted
Make um silver bullet	Moulded them as silver bullets
Lead no good	The lead bullets were useless.
Dey came bring him now	They are coming and bringing him now.
Make um strong charm,too	I also made them lay a strong charm on these bullets.
Nix on that old sailing ship stuff	Switch on that old sailing ship.
All ovah de board	All over the gaming board.

This type of language use can be found in Black English. The Black English speakers fluctuate between sentences like 'Him dead', 'He is dead' and' me no steal', 'I don't steal'.

References

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