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SITUATING CHICK LIT OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH IN PRINT AND ONLINE

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Although it has non-white precursors such as *Waiting to Exhale* (1992) by African American writer Terry McMillan, chick lit is often traced back to a British and/or a US import, namely Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) and Candace Bushnell's *Sex and the City* (1997) which "began as newspaper columns and went on to become bestsellers."[1] Unsurprisingly in this context, the genre, which emerged from the very centre of the late capitalist world system, is generally seen as an expression of a 'big-city' Western subjectivity while being typically associated with a 'post-feminist' culture and sensibility, that is, a "practice, ideology, and way of being"[2] where female agency is predicated on consumption, individualism, and freedom of choice.

However, critics working within the fields of popular cultures of the Global South have suggested that there might be more to the chick lit genre than just Bridget Jones's (or Carrie Bradshaw's) 'post-feminist' Anglo-American narrative. Two major developments troubling assumptions about the "white-normative"[3] and western-centric aspect of the chick lit genre are of special interest to us in this chapter. The first development relates to the creation of chick lit imprints situated outside the Anglo-American literary market with local and/or trans-regional audiences in mind, notably in India and in the English and French speaking part of sub-Saharan Africa.[4] For instance, in Nigeria, Ankara Press established a local chick lit imprint in 2014,[5] while Penguin India launched Metro Reads in 2010, a series offering "racy quickies"[6] to big-city commuters. In South Africa alone, 2010 saw the creation of Nollybooks and Sapphire Press, both imprints targeting Black 'born-frees' using different storylines and various formats. Equally importantly, the multiplication of 'local' chick lit imprints in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa now goes hand in hand with the popularisation of social media and digital

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technologies, which is "radically changing the composition, size and power of the African reading public" and has led to a "second wave of African literary production on social media platforms."[7] This is exemplified, for instance, by the recent creation of the Kenyan Drumbeat-Romance-series, which publishes chick lit in eBook format, or the phenomenal success of Mike Maphoto's serialised Facebook chick lit blog, *Diary of a Zulu Girl* (2013), whose digital format allowed Maphoto to interact with his readers,[8] even to take on board some of their comments and tailor his storyline according to the real-life experiences of the 'born-free' generation.[9]

In the emerging ecologies of chick lit in Nigeria and India, social mobility and aspiration are key themes that are also inscribed into the form itself, which is often tackled by aspiring authors who are very active in building an audience, not least on social media. The question remains, though, as to what extent Global South iterations of chick lit can accommodate the cracks inherent in the tension between, on the one hand, a genre with roots in the urban metropolis and in the English language, and on the other, narratives based in globalising cities of the Global South where "jumbled up" and "palimpsestic cultural times" are made to co-exist.[10] Needless to say, these projects are not always successful or even coherent literarily speaking. Yet they open new windows onto the ways in which the key theme of aspiration – which is itself framed by local contexts of production – plays out on the thematic and linguistic levels. More specifically, in this chapter, we want to study the role of englishes in Indian and Nigerian chick lit, where strategic uses of different forms of englishes are interrelated with the protagonists' as well as the authors' aspirational projects.

In the context of post-liberalisation India, Rashmi Sadana notes that English is both "a language of aspiration and a curse for those [who are] not in a position to master it."[11] The cultural anthropologist indeed reminds us that "English is spoken fluently by close to 5 percent of Indians and is 'known' by as much as 10 percent of the population (i.e., about 50 million to 100 million people of a population of just over one billion)."[12] Sadana emphasises a significant shift in perception of English in post-liberalisation India – from a "language of colonization" to a "language of aspiration" (6). In fact, she continues, English is now "integral to middle-class identity" (3) in the subcontinent, so much so that "people speak not of 'knowing' English but of 'having' it" (14). Alluding to the "disparate thought-worlds" that are associated with the daily practice of multilingualism in India and transposing them to Indian fiction in English, Sadana notes that English might be "part of the social scene" but that "the bulk of conversations and sentiments of fictional characters would in reality take place not in English but in one or more of the other Indian languages" (4). Sadana's remarks about English as a language of aspiration and the "disparate thought-worlds" at play in multilingual societies apply equally well to the Nigerian context. In fact, in

self-published Nigerian Anglophone chick lit, the authors' balancing act of faithfulness to the genre on the one hand and need to reshape it on the other is reflected in their sometimes creative use of non-local dialects and idioms. A reason for this is arguably that certain kinds of non-Nigerian language practices and codes are associated with metropolitan urban culture and a materially comfortable life, while more local and traditional ways of naming and speaking are connected with social immobility. Romanus Aboh argues for the existence of a literary idiom – "Nigerian Literary English" – that is associated with creative writing and that is perceived by readers as distinctly Nigerian.[13] We hesitate to assume the existence of a definable literary idiom with its own linguistic properties that is found only in literary works and is distinct from Standard Nigerian English. However, we want to underscore Aboh's point that it is possible to conceptualise the English in some forms of Nigerian literature as a literary construct and "a variety of English that many Nigerians can identify with."[14] Rather than *a* literary English, we see the use of English in self-published Nigerian genre-fiction as a mix of englishes for rhetorical and aesthetic purposes. In other words, particularly in self-published 'popular' literature, there is often a polyglossic shifting (rather than switching) between Nigerian and non-Nigerian englishes, sociolects, dialects, ethnolects, gendered registers, and so on. Nuances between different forms of English (and Pidgin), we argue, take on more than superficial meaning in the narrative.

This chapter looks at how englishes are used strategically in selected Indian and Nigerian chick lit texts, particularly in relation to narratives about social mobility, to signal rootedness in the local but also connectedness with lifestyles and identity constructions that are associated with spaces located beyond the 'here and now' – what Myambo calls "first-world cultural time zones."[15] In what follows, we endorse Sandra Ponzanesi's remarks that if, on the one hand "the genre reveals common patterns of denomination, linked to consumerism, female upward mobility and rapid urbanization," on the other, chick lit from countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia "presents inherent features linked to the country-specific economic development, particular histories of feminism and locally inflected responses to commoditized patterns of behaviour."[16] We also take as a point of departure the position that Lynda Gichanda Spencer defines when, taking on board Stephanie Newell's suggestion that dominant genres can also "signify resistance, reassertion, renewal and rethinking"[17] whenever they are taken up by writers who are "situated geographically and economically outside the centres of mass production," she describes chick lit from the Global South as an "uprising form," one that is "capable of conveying potentially radical challenges to (dominant) gender ideologies."[18]

Looking at selected Indian and Nigerian commercial fiction (both born-digital and in print), this chapter opens new vistas on how 'local' chick

lit from the Global South "registers its situated-ness"[19] by both adopting ideologies and genre conventions central to "mainstream" Western chick lit and "rethinking" them.[20] More specifically, we are interested in studying chick lit as a form that "works in tandem with the economic policies of global neoliberal capitalism to construct a desirable world order where the values of materialistic individualism reigns supreme"[21] but that moves across an economic world system that is uneven, multi-polar, and multilingual, including within the postcolony.

India: Having English

The paradox of chick lit as a potentially "uprising form"[22] that can convey radical challenges to gender conservatism and yet continues to "wor[k] in tandem with the economic policies of global neoliberal capitalism,"[23] to return to Myambo's words, is nowhere more evident than in contemporary Indian commercial fiction. In fact, as we will show in this section, writers such as Chetan Bhagat, Anuja Chauhan, Durjoy Datta, and Sudeep Nagarkar appear to be hyper-conscious of the fact that English stands at the heart of many social changes in post-liberalisation India, and Bhagat even goes as far as self-reflexively (and strategically) alluding to his own work as a means of entering the social scene associated with this "language of aspiration" (Sadana).

Bhavya Tiwari notes that in the last two decades, new writings in English have emerged that are "independent from the literary and publishing connections" that South Asian diasporic 'star' authors of the past, such as Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh, often "enjoyed in the UK and North America."[24] As Abhijit Gupta remarks, the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the 1990s went hand in hand with the coming of satellite television and new English-language print and electronic media, all of which have "generated a set of new narrative protocols that found their ways into fiction"[25] and conjured up "a new regime of English-language publishing in India."[26] Mostly falling within the commercial categories of "chick lit, lad lit, and Bharati fantasy"[27] or confusingly more than one or two of these categories,[28] these new writings are not marked for export and are "distributed outside the metropolitan bookstore circuit, in gas stations and traffic stops, convenience stores and footpaths."[29]

Designed to appeal to the lower- and middle-class Indian youth, post-millennial 'tween lit,' which Basu associates with a "third phase in the realm of Indian writing in English"[30] sells at INR 100 (USD 1.20) and sometimes lower in pirated versions. This is about six times cheaper than 'literary' Indian writing in English à la Ghosh and Rushdie, whose "second-phase" elitist texts are much feted abroad but are perceived to boil down, at home, "to a short extract in textbooks meant for select Indian high schools."[31]

FIGURE 10.1 Bookstalls close to Churchgate, one of Mumbai's main inner-city train hubs, December 2022. Photograph by Delphine Munos.

Disregarded as they may be by cultural commentators who call them "lo-cal literati,"[32] writers such as Chetan Bhagat, Anuja Chauhan, Durjoy Datta, and Sudeep Nagarkar, among others, have vibrantly captured the lives of a contemporary Indian youth who navigate "exam culture, family expectations, professional anxieties, and often stifling horizons"[33] but embrace new forms of aspiration such as "entrepreneurialism, social mobility, financial independence (and) individual success"[34] in the context of postmillennial India. This is a context within which the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the early 1990s has overlapped with new developments such as the rise of Hindu nationalism (especially in the wake of the election of Narendra Modi in 2014); the framing of Muslim Indians as second-class citizens by the dominant discourse of Hindutva; the ever-growing influence of the middle classes;[35] and "a flourishing of cultural production outside the erstwhile elite centres of artistic and literary value," which also includes films and born-digital products such as "interactive media, music, podcasts, webzines, stand-up comedy, spoken word, satire, journalism, blogs, web series, spoofs, remakes and countless others."[36]

Looking at local tween lit and genre fiction from the vantage point of 2019, Ulka Anjaria contends that the new face of Indian literature goes hand

in hand with what she calls "new provincialism," that is, a shift away from a 'Western-friendly' postcolonial and/or diasporic 'big-city' vocabulary of loss, exile, migrancy, melancholy, and trauma, to a determination to give visibility to "the long-ignored Tier 2 and 3 cities"[37] in the subcontinent, "locating livable [sic] futures not only in India's megalopolises that more easily exemplify capitalist aspiration but also in India's less fashionable regions and provincial towns."[38] In the introduction to *Reading India Today*, Anjaria remarks that Bhagat's *Half Girlfriend* (2014)[39] is a case in point, as the protagonist refuses to stay in the USA after the end of his internship with the Gates Foundation in New York, returns home, and finally makes it in Bihar (of all places!)[40] instead, in a move that combines "enterprise, romance, and return."[41] Remarking that postcolonial fiction is obsessed with history while "the new English-language commercial fictions" are firmly anchored in the contemporary and "seek alternatives both to the secular cosmopolitanism of the Rushdie generation and to a statist nationalism,"[42] the critic emphasises that the latter category broaches "new themes" such as "aspiration, everyday life, sexuality and desire, dreams for better selves, dreams for a better India, provincialism, and new futures."[43]

Clearly, Bhagat's very successful writings mark a watershed moment for the emergence of Anjaria's "new provincialism," since the writer, who "claims 'blockbuster' status"[44] for his work, directly addresses his Indian readers with "endearing intimacy" in his books, especially those living in small towns, "where the newest and hungriest generation of Indian readers proliferate."[45] No wonder, then, that Bhagat moved from dedicating his first novel, *One Night @ the Call Centre* (2007; 2005), to his "twin baby boys" and his wife,[46] to dedicating *Half Girlfriend* (2014), which was published about a decade afterwards, to "his mother, rural India, and the non-English types."[47] As Tiwari, Anjaria, and Viswamohan[48] suggest, Bhagat's increasing use of reader addresses to what he calls the "non-English types" in *Half Girlfriend* constructs his ideal readership as small-town ordinary young men who aspire to "the Indian Dream" but are "plagued with the regular insecurities of an average misfit."[49] As Bhagat's dedication to rural India and "the non-English types" makes clear, these insecurities centre on the English language, which indirectly emphasises "a connection between class and language."[50]

In *Half Girlfriend*, Madhav Jha, the protagonist from Dumraon, Bihar, initially feels insecure about his English, which he describes as being "90 per cent Bihari Hindi mixed with 10 per cent really bad English" (section 1). As he declares at the start of the novel, his "really bad English" of yore is the reason why he will spare his readers "a headache" and "say everything in [proper] English" instead, even if he asks them, too, to resuscitate his past self and "imagine [his] words in Bhojpuri-laced Hindi, with the worst possible English thrown in" (section 1). In a later passage, as Madhav is

still insecure about his English and conscientiously prepares for an interview, he lists ten "tools" through which he will improve his speaking skills, which range from forcing himself to spend "English-only days – no Hindi conversation allowed," through "working on speech content in Hindi first," to "reading *simple* English novels,"[51] which his love interest, that is, the "half girlfriend" of the title, instantly translates as "reading simple English novels, like, the one by that writer, what's his name, Chetan Bhagat" (section 25).

In keeping with other writers of 'tween lit' such as Anuja Chauhan,[52] Bhagat thus makes it clear that English always exists alongside Hindi and other Indian languages (or 'bhashas') in today's India, and his brand of "stripped-down English" reflects a "provincialist imaginary" through which the language of aspiration is not celebrated for its "literary beauty – for what it represents" but boils down to a "practical vehicle for self-transformation," that is, a "means to an end."[53] In many ways, *Half Girlfriend* offers fascinating insights into the hierarchies of language and linguistic divides at play in today's India, which get replayed too, within Madhav's own subjectivity. In fact, the inner split generated by Madhav's aspirational subjectivity (which intersects with his obsession with "having" English, to return to Sadana's remark, and having sex with Riya, his upper-class "half girlfriend") is nowhere more evident than in his Hindi-medium gut reaction to what he perceives to be physical rejection from his love interest. As he comes to visit the one that his class-obsessed friends have nicknamed "the BMW 5-series Riya Somani" (section 7), she insists on them being platonic lovers, and Madhav uses physical force to try to kiss her. In a last-ditch attempt to make out with her, Madhav switches from English to Hindi, which is left untranslated in the novel. He then blurts out "deti hai to de, varna kat le" in "coarse Bhojpuri-accented Hindi," which he first sugarcoats as "make love to me or leave" and then moves on to translate more accurately as "fuck me or fuck off" (section 11). This code-switching suggests that what Madhav retroactively reads as the shameful expression of his "combined state of horniness, bravado and stupidity" (section 12) could only take place in Hindi (and "coarse Bhojpuri-accented Hindi" at that), which implicitly creates a linguistic hierarchy between English, Hindi, and Bhojpuri. Moreover, Madhav's embattled subjectivity is reflected in the different translations he offers in the novel, which illuminates Madhav's desire to aspire to "English-type" respectability while residually identifying, on the gut level, with "a crass Bihari from Dumraon" (section 11), as he later acknowledges.

To return to Basu's terminology about the different phases of Indian writing in English, even if the "second" and "third" phases appear to share a common language, namely English, and a similar desire to "provincialize" English by bringing it "into intimate proximity"[54] with national and regional vernaculars (such as Hindi), it is perhaps clear by now that Rushdie's famed indigenisation (or "chutnification") of English is markedly different from the

"Hinglish" wielded by third-phase writers, who do not lead "a hyphenated existence."[55] Relying on Gayatri Spivak's remark that writers who divide their time between the Indian subcontinent and the Western world abrogate Standard English and claim the vernacular so as to make a "public declaration of ethnic identity in metropolitan space,"[56] Basu notes that, by contrast, the use of code-switching by writers of the Bhagat generation is emphatically "homegrown."[57] As we have previously discussed, Bhagat code-switches between Hindi and English. Similarly, Durjoy Datta incorporates Gujarati into his English,[58] and Chauhan's chick lit deploys a "mixed Hindi-English vocabulary that is less interested in translating itself for an international readership [...] than in making visible the richness and nuance of Indian English itself as a variably accented language."[59] Because he writes columns in both the English and Hindi presses, Bhagat also further develops his readership via Hindi-language newspapers, a presence across languages that allows him to bridge the gap between India's reading and book cultures and to appeal to Hindi-medium readers who might find it easier, in turn, to switch back and forth between his journalistic pieces in Hindi and in English and his easy-to-read English fiction.[60] For Suman Gupta, Indian commercial fiction in English thus traces "a circuit of Indians talking to Indians in a closed space, a national space, albeit in the most international of languages."[61]

Nigerian Chick Lit: Plural Englishes, Aspiration, and Economic Unevenness

As in Western chick lit, a central dilemma in Nigerian chick lit is the balance between career, love, and independence. The protagonist is typically in her early thirties and stuck in what Alcinda Honwana (2012) has called "waithood" – a prolonged period of waiting for an opportunity to get established enough to leave social adolescence behind and become an adult in the eyes of the community.[62] From a normative perspective, for many Nigerian women this typically means getting married and having children. From the perspective of the texts discussed in the following, this requires that the protagonist's future husband be wealthy enough to provide the material security deemed necessary to start a family.

There is, in other words, an aspirational narrative at the heart of the text. The protagonist's hopes and dreams are at the centre of the text and at the same time projected onto an uncertain future that likely will be revealed at the end of the story. However, in the works discussed, aspiration for a better future for the individual is not only thematised in the narrative, but is also inscribed in the text itself, since these works are written by self-published, non-professional but aspiring authors. The texts can be seen as the result of the authors' largely unaided attempts to create a textual product that appeals to as large an audience as possible. Therefore, their authorial decisions can

be interpreted not only as discursive, rhetorical, or aesthetic but as part of the authors' audience-building. This perspective can be applied to traditionally published texts as well, but these non-professional authors are also editors, publishers, and marketers, and it is therefore difficult to separate the commercial, ideological, and aesthetic aspects of the work. As we will see in a moment, the authors' strategic use of englishes is one way in which these aspects of the text are interconnected.

Notions of what is and is not proper for unmarried women are often a component in Nigerian chick lit, particularly when these ideas are negotiable. In Olayemi Oyinkansola's self-published chick lit novella *Finding Mr. Right* (2020), the relation between wealth and religious faith is a central topic.[63] The female main characters discuss their relation to God and the important role religion plays in their lives, and they expect it to be important also to the men they consider as their future husbands. The protagonist Kiki, who is older than her friends and flatmates Ify and Pelz/Pearls, often questions their choices in men and brings them back down to earth when they become excited about receiving the attention of men, asking what they really know about their commitment to God. However, as a Christian woman, she has a hard time justifying the fact that what she considers a worthy future husband is a man who is wealthy, since what she should look for in a man is faith. At one point in the story Kiki explicitly points out the problem in her philosophy about what qualities a husband should have and says to her friend Ify that according to her Christian beliefs, a poor but spiritual man should make a good husband. The issue is resolved when the friends agree that wanting a wealthy husband is not in itself the problem, but the fact that some women, like their friend Pearls, are moved by "money and looks" and forget about spirituality. A key problem in the narrative, then, is how the African urban everyday can be brought into contact with life-worlds characterised by economic affluence without disturbing the moral codes that the text relies on. While this problem is central also to Western metropolitan chick lit, the Nigerian chick lit author deals with particular limitations and possibilities generated by the unevenness of an economy that is characterised by the simultaneous proximity and distance of abject poverty and extreme wealth.

In Joy Eju'ojo's chick lit novella *The Reunion*, which is currently serialised on the Nigerian literary platform *Ebonystory*,[64] the everyday is represented in the beginning of the story, where the protagonist Mariah is working as a cashier in a supermarket and has to deal with rude costumers. She gets an opportunity to get out of this life when she is invited to a school reunion at a luxury hotel in an unnamed Nigerian city. The reunion is organised and paid for by Stevie, a former classmate who now is an internationally successful musician and celebrity. The men at the party have all achieved economic success since they finished school and are now professional basketball players, businessmen, and celebrities, and so Mariah and her quirky friend Lisa spend

their time at the party trying to figure out who of these men are real gentlemen with a good heart, and thus eligible for marriage. The problem with the abstract distance between precarity and wealth is solved by the author's invention of a relatively unlikely but interesting scenario: it later turns out that the class reunion is an orchestrated media stunt designed to boost Stevie's celebrity status. The former classmates who attend the party, and between whom a romantic drama immediately develops, are filmed around the clock. The outcome for the less affluent former classmates, who pursue those whose fortunes have been better, in other words, does not only depend on their attractiveness to their love interests. There is also the chance that they will make their success by charming the future audience of the media spectacle and that this will offer a way into a better future.

The unevenness on which the Nigerian chick lit text stands is to an extent smoothed out, so to speak, through the application of a language in which a specific kind of euphemism is the main rhetorical trope. As has been indicated, the type of Nigerian chick lit text discussed here finds its way around the problem of connecting the worlds of precarity and wealth by focalising places, situations, and language that are associated with the latter by erasing the former. This happens on a linguistic level, by shifting the English used toward Western idioms, but also on the level of literary invention, thorough placing the heroines in unusual scenarios that take them away from everyday life.

Englishes, Nicknames, and De-Familiarisation

One example of the strategic use of a form of English that is conspicuously non-Nigerian is expressions and nicknames borrowed from Black American English. In *The Reunion*, the main characters Mariah and Lisa not only have Western names, like the men they flirt with; they also speak with "duh voices," "squeal like high school girls," give each other "goofy smiles," call each other "babe," and are "shopaholics" in search of "potential boos" whom they address as "dude." However, although the two heroines sometimes talk like US chick lit and rom-com protagonists and find themselves in situations that are common in American romantic comedies, they are at other times unmistakably Nigerian. They use "abeg," "oo," and other expressions and interjections that are associated with Nigerian Pidgin and Nigerian English. The language used in dialogues is in other words both familiarising and defamiliarising. Like the unlikely reunion party scenario that Mariah and Lisa find themselves in, the Westernised English they sometimes speak emphasises their (temporary) distance from the everyday. However, the use of phrases in Nigerian Pidgin here and there reminds us that Mariah and Lisa are less exceptional than Mariah's male ex-classmates, who due to careers overseas have become extremely wealthy and whose English is markedly non-Nigerian.

In Olayemi Oyinkansola's *Finding Mr. Right*, the protagonist and narrator's name is central in the opening of the narrative. Her name is Kikelomo ("pampered child" in Yoruba), but she is called Kiki by her friends Ifeoma and Pelumi, the narrator explains, whom she calls Ify and Pelz or Pearls in return. They are the only ones brave enough to call her Kiki, however, because her father has since her childhood insisted that she be referred to by her full name. This foreshadows plot events that can be seen as typical in the genre. The reader learns early on that Kiki is twenty-nine and some months. She says that by this age, she is "supposed to be married with one and a half kids (if you understand), in [her] own house, having a car of [her] own, a fat bank account and a good job." Instead, she does not have much going for her. However, the reader knows from the prologue, which takes place months after the beginning of the story, that she will be interviewed on a talk show in Washington, DC. There, she is welcomed on stage to the crowd's cheers as Kiki, which is the name by which she has reached success and become famous and adored.

The first comic scene in the story sees Kiki enter her home, tired and beaten down because she feels that her life is at a standstill. She is welcomed home by her flatmates, and Pelz announces that she will from now on go by "Pearls." Kiki refuses to call her friend by this name, and it becomes clear why when Ify and Pelz trick her to try to pronounce the name, which makes her lips look like "a sagging wire abi na oversucked orange." What makes the word difficult for Kiki to pronounce is presumably the vowel (and semi-vowel), which in Nigerian English would be more open (the semi-vowel would not be pronounced) than in Standard American and British English.

As a narrator, Kiki, like the omniscient narrator in Eju'ojo's *The Reunion*, uses an English with very few obvious Nigerianisms, and this frequently leads to ambiguity and semantic slippage. When one of the girls, Ify, brings her future fiancé home for the first time and it turns out he has helped her "ma" out of a bind some days before the meeting, the mother and the boyfriend stand up and hug, and Ify and her father exclaim "So you guys know each other?!" In this particular context, it would have been reasonable to assume that they speak Igbo even though the dialogue is in English, but since the boyfriend is Yoruba, they must actually speak English, which makes the very American and very informal use of the genderless "guys" stand out even more. The women in the text exclaim "yass!," call each other "babe" and "girl" and their love interests "boo," which might seem out of place but semantically correct, but an unfaithful husband is described as an "infidel."

In *The Reunion*, linguistic confusion is caused through non-typical use of idiomatic expressions. Having arrived at the hotel where the reunion takes place, Mariah and Lisa immediately split up as they approach different romantic interests. The morning after their arrival, Mariah therefore wakes up to find that Lisa has snuck into her room to sleep. She throws a pillow

at Lisa and yells at her "in her bedroom voice," while Lisa tries to calm her down with a "pillow talk voice." The sexual connotations of the idiomatic use of the metonyms *bedroom* and *pillow* do not seem to be evoked consciously in this passage, since this would imply a sexual tension between the two friends in a text that is otherwise staunchly heteronormative. Instead, the passage can be read as an attempt at a neutral joke, based on the repetition of terms belonging to the same semantic domain: bedroom voice, in this context, means an explicitly frustrated voice, while pillow-talk means to speak softly.

Our point here is not that the texts contain a number of awkward linguistic choices but that the instances of linguistic instability are a sign that the authors use non-Standard codes and idioms because of their perceived distance from the ordinary and familiar. The texts are self-published online, on platforms whose users are predominantly Nigerian, so the reason for this choice of code is arguably not to reach a global audience primarily, since this would not explain the frequent use of local expressions and interjections and the use of Nigerian Pidgin. Instead, the non-standard Nigerian English used by the narrators and the markedly American nicknames and expressions used in dialogue might be meant to be associated with "socioeconomic advancement" and a lifestyle that exists *elsewhere*,[65] far away in socio-economic terms from spaces of economic precarity. In both of the texts, men who show a command of European or American English are not only also described as wealthy or as having prospects in life but are considered possible future husbands. What is intended to be interpreted as the protagonists' command of non-Nigerian English, therefore, might be seen as signalling preparedness for a prosperous future even when they struggle to find a way forward in life. If this is so, however, the linguistic instability in the texts must in turn be read as anchoring the text on one side of the economic unevenness: the side of relative precarity and waithood.

Social Mobility, Aspiration, and Formal Transformations in the Global South

As we hope to have shown in this chapter, aspiration and upward social mobility are at the centre of the chick lit text, not least in Global South iterations of the genre. As Srijanai Ghosh argues, commodities, consumption, and identity construction are "triangulat[ed]" in the chick lit genre,[66] in that the consumption of actual products and objects of desire but also social connections lays the foundation for the emergence of a sense of self. Anglophone Global South chick lit might use a formerly colonial language and rely on the Anglo-American 'chick-lit formula' – what Suman Gupta calls a "global commercial fiction publishing template."[67] Still, the fact that this brand of popular literature is "saturated with local content"[68] and is aimed at local

and/or regional audiences often makes it a perfect vehicle for engaging with context-specific gender politics and for offering fascinating insights into the palimpsestic language hierarchies and disparate thought-worlds at play in India and Nigeria. Unsurprisingly in this context, Melissa Tandiwe Myambo has theorised chick lit's journey from Europe/North America to Africa and Asia as a form of "frontier migration."[69] The term refers to the moving "of people, capital, ideas and technology from a more 'developed' economy to a less 'developed' one," and the phenomenon is "deeply influenced by the hierarchies inherent in geopolitical power relations."[70] Again, this means that the rhetoric, style, and focus of the chick-lit novel inevitably must be negotiated as it is adopted by writers in the Global South. As we have discussed in selected Indian and Nigerian chick lit, linguistic strategies are also employed by writers and characters to negotiate these relations between identity, social mobility, and the futures worth aspiring to, and these negotiations are made partly through strategic uses of a variety of englishes that reflect the entanglement of the local and the global within the postcolony.

Notes

1 Lynda Gichanda Spencer, " 'In Defence of Chick-Lit': Refashioning Feminine Subjectivities in Ugandan and South African Contemporary Women's Writing," *Feminist Theory* 20.2 (2019): 156.
2 Pamila Gupta and Ronit Frenkel, "Chick-Lit in a Time of African Cosmopolitanism," *Feminist Theory* 20.2 (2019): 124.
3 Pamela Butler and Jigna Desai, "Manolos, Marriage and Mantras: Chick-Lit Criticism and Transnational Feminism," *Meridians: Feminisms, Race, Transnationalism* 8.2 (2008): 3.
4 See Susanne Gehrmann, "Varieties of Romance in Contemporary Popular Togolese Literature," in *Routledge Handbook of African Popular Culture*, edited by Grace A. Musila and Karin Barber (Basingstoke: Routledge, 2022): 74–91; Lynda Gichanda Spencer, "In Defence of Chick-Lit"; Rebecca Fasselt, "Chick Lit Politics in a Post-Truth Era: Tricksters, Blessees and Postfeminist Girlpower in Angela Makholwa's *The Blessed Girl*," *Safundi* 19.4 (2018): 375–397; and Suman Gupta, "Contemporary Indian Commercial Fiction in English," in *South Asian Fiction in English: Contemporary Transformations*, edited by Alex Tickell (London: Palgrave Macmillan London, 2016): 139–161.
5 See Gehrmann, "Varieties of Romance," 84.
6 See Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty, "A Novel Idea," *The Hindu Online*, 17 February 2010.
7 Shola Adenekan, Rhonda Cobham-Sander, Stephanie Bosch Santana, and Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang, "Introduction to the Guest Issue," in *Digital Africas*, edited by Shola Adenekan, Rhonda Cobham-Sander, Stephanie Bosch Santana, and Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang. Spec. issue of *Postcolonial Text* 15.3/4 (2020): 3, www.postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/2702.
8 See Stephanie Bosh Santana, "From Nation to Network: Blog and Facebook Fiction from Southern Africa," *Research in African Literatures* 49.1 (Spring 2018): 197–208.
9 See Mike Maphoto's "The South African Story is a Universal Story: Mike Maphoto at TEDxSoweto," 29 November 2019. www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGhvGhAmrpg (last accessed 21 April 2024).

10 Melissa Tandiwe Myambo, “The Spatial Politics of Chick Lit in Africa and Asia: Sidestepping Tradition and Fem-Washing Global Capitalism?” *Feminist Theory* 21.1 (2020): 116.
11 Rashmi Sadana, *English Heart, Hindi Heartland: The Political Life of Literature in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012): 5.
12 Sadana, *English Heart*, 14. Further page references are in the main text.
13 Romanus Aboh, *Language and the Construction of Multiple Identities in the Nigerian Novel* (Makhanda: NISC, 2018): 81.
14 Aboh, *Language*, 81.
15 See Myambo, “The Spatial Politics of Chick Lit.”
16 Sandra Ponzanesi, *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry: Icons, Markets, Mythologies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 176.
17 Stephanie Newell, *Ghanaian Popular Fiction: Thrilling Discoveries in Conjugal Life and Other Tales* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000): 144.
18 Spencer, “In Defence of Chick-Lit,” 158.
19 Ashleigh Harris and Nicklas Hållén, “African Street Literature: A Method for an Emergent Form Beyond World Literature,” *Research in African Literatures* 51.2 (2020): 22.
20 Spencer, “In Defence of Chick-Lit,” 159.
21 Eva Chen, “Shanghai(ed) Babies: Geopolitics, Biopolitics and the Global Chick Lit,” *Feminist Media Studies* 12.2 (2012): 217.
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23 Myambo, “The Spatial Politics of Chick Lit,” 115.
24 Bhavya Tiwari, “The Multilingual Anglophone: World Literature and Post-Millennial Literature in Postcolonial India,” *Interventions* 23.4 (2021): 624–625.
25 Abhijit Gupta, “Popular Writing in India,” in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, edited by Ato Quayson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 1032.
26 Gupta, “Popular Writing in India,” 1033.
27 Tiwari, “The Multilingual Anglophone,” 625.
28 For instance, Anuja Chauhan’s *The Zoya Factor* is both marketed as ‘cricket lit’ and ‘chick lit,’ and Sudeep Nagarkar’s commercial fiction mixes the conventions of both chick lit and lad lit. See Anuja Chauhan, *The Zoya Factor* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008) and Sudeep Nagarkar, *You’re Trending in My Dreams* (London: Ebury Press, 2017).
29 Priya Joshi, “Chetan Bhagat: Remaking the Novel in India,” in *A History of the Indian Novel in English*, edited by Ulka Anjaria (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 311.
30 Manisha Basu, *The Rhetoric of Hindu India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017): 167.
31 Basu, *The Rhetoric of Hindu India*, 166.
32 Sheela Reddy cited in Joshi, “Chetan Bhagat,” 315. Joshi argues that in Reddy’s hyphenated moniker, the prefix ‘lo’ emphasises both their “lowbrow status” and the “local nature of their popularity.”
33 Joshi, “Chetan Bhagat,” 311.
34 Ulka Anjaria, *Reading India Now: Contemporary Formations in Literature and Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2019): 29.
35 See Rupa Oza, *The Making of Neoliberal India: Nationalism, Gender, and the Paradoxes of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
36 Anjaria, *Reading India Now*, 10.
37 Joshi, “Chetan Bhagat,” 317.
38 Anjaria, *Reading India Now*, 29.
39 Chetan Bhagat, *Half Girlfriend* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2014).

40 Bihar is one of the most deprived Indian states and is described as the "poorest of the poor" in *Half Girlfriend* (see section 1).
41 Anjaria, *Reading India Now*, 27.
42 Anjaria, *Reading India Now*, 29.
43 Anjaria, *Reading India Now*, 13.
44 Joshi, "Chetan Bhagat," 314.
45 Joshi, "Chetan Bhagat," 315.
46 See Chetan Bhagat, *One Night @ The Call Centre* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2007 [2005]): np. Tiwari notes that *One Night* is dedicated to Bhagat's "alma mater" and "his mother," which contradicts the dedication made in the edition of the book used for this chapter.
47 Tiwari, "The Multilingual Anglophone," 626.
48 Aysha Iqbal Viswamohan, "Marketing Lad Lit, Creating Bestsellers: The Importance of Being Chetan Bhagat," in *Postliberalization Indian Novels in English*, edited by Aysha Iqbal Viswamohan (London: Anthem Press, 2013): 19–29.
49 Viswamohan, "Marketing Lad Lit," 27.
50 Tiwari, "The Multilingual Anglophone," 626.
51 Our emphasis.
52 See Charmaine Carvalho, "National Romances: Singleton Desire and the Discovery of India in Chick Lit Narratives," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 44.5 (2021): 834–850.
53 Anjaria, *Reading India Now*, 49.
54 Basu, *The Rhetoric of Hindu India*, 171.
55 Viswamohan, "Marketing Lad Lit," 21.
56 Spivak cited in Basu, *The Rhetoric of Hindu India*, 171.
57 Basu, *The Rhetoric of Hindu India*, 172.
58 See Joshi, "Chetan Bhagat," 315.
59 Anjaria, *Reading India Now*, 53.
60 See Joshi, "Chetan Bhagat," 318.
61 Gupta, "Contemporary Indian Commercial Fiction in English," 150.
62 See Alcinda M. Honwana, *The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change, and Politics in Africa* (West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 2012).
63 Olayemi Oyinkansola, *Finding Mr. Right*, Okadabooks.com, 2022. The primary texts discussed in this section have no page numbers.
64 Joy Eju'ojó, *The Reunion: A Novel*, Ebonystory.com, no date.
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66 Srijani Gosh, "Spectacular Selves: Fashion and Identity in Lee Tulloch's Fabulous Nobodies," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 55.2 (2022): 333.
67 Gupta, "Contemporary Indian Commercial Fiction," 150.
68 Spencer, "In Defence of Chick-Lit," 159.
69 Myambo, "The Spatial Politics of Chick Lit," 112.
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