

# Wordplay for National Identity: The Literary Case of the Ex-colony Mozambique

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The post-colonial Mozambican peoples incorporated

features of [their original identity] into a new hybrid identity that reflected their new existence as a new nation state (Anchimbe 2007:9).

The writer Mia Couto aims at manifesting the evolving national identity by setting out in writing the everyday ludic language use (Cavacas 1999): contemporary Mozambican Portuguese is a melting pot of loanwords from Bantu-languages and the creation of deviations from the European norm by word formation techniques such as compounds, derivations, and conversions. Additionally, Couto exploits the structural features of the Portuguese language

in order to bring about a communicatively significant confrontation of two (or more) linguistic structures with more or less similar forms and more or less different meanings (Delabastita 1996: 128).

Therefore, Couto's literary style both reflects daily spoken Mozambican Portuguese and author-specific wordplays such as portmanteaus and idiom transformations.

- (1) compounds: *passar* (to stroll) + *noite* (night)
  - a. Couto: *um passa-noite* (night-stroller)
  - b. Translator: 'Nachtgänger' (night-walker)
- (2) derivations: *im-* + *pestanejar* + *-ável* (un-twinkle-able)
  - a. C: *impestanejável* (untwinkable)
  - b. T: *zuckte mit keiner Wimper* (batted no eye)
- (3) portmanteaus: *atrapalhado* (lumbering) + *palhaço* (clown)
  - a. C: *atrapalhaço* (clowmbering)
  - b. T: *verwirrt* (puzzled)
- (4) idiom transformations: *custar os olhos da cara* (to cost a packet)
  - a. C: *custasse os olhos e a cara* (albeit it costs a neck)
  - b. T: *auch wenn es mich Kopf und Ehre kostete* (albeit it costs my neck and honour)

The combination of individual wordplays with everyday ludic language and its exaggeration by Couto poses a big challenge for the translator. Drawing the line correctly between those categories requires in-depth knowledge of the Mozambican variety. The German translator mostly replaced all three categories with wordplays or correspondent devices (cf. Delabastita 1996).

## References

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