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Code-Switching and Creole Expression as Voices of Resistance in Andrea Levy's Fiction: *Small Island* and *The Long Song*

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Abstract

This paper argues that Andrea Levy's novels, Small Island and The Long Song, chart a diachronic progression of linguistic resistance within the Jamaican diaspora. It posits that Small Island depicts the situational, often fraught, code-switching of the Windrush generation as a strategy of navigating and surviving the colonial metropole, reflecting an ongoing negotiation with the linguistic power of the empire. In contrast, The Long Song employs Creole narration as a form of structural resistance, embodying Kamau Brathwaite's concept of "nation language" to reclaim historical narrative and subvert the very foundations of colonial discourse. By juxtaposing the aspirational hypercorrection of Hortense Joseph with the historiographic metafiction of July's voice, this paper demonstrates Levy's sophisticated critique of how language functions as both a tool of colonial psychological conditioning and a powerful medium for decolonization. Through a synthesized framework of sociolinguistic and postcolonial theory, the analysis reveals Levy's profound insight into the evolution of a decolonizing voice, moving from individual acts of accommodation and defiance to a collective, ancestral act of narrative reclamation.

Keywords: code-switching, Creole, linguistic resistance, postcolonial literature, Andrea Levy, Small Island, The Long Song, nation language, decolonization, Jamaican diaspora.

Introduction

Andrea Levy stands as a pivotal figure in Black British literature, a writer whose oeuvre is profoundly dedicated to excavating the legacies of the British Empire and illuminating the complex, often deliberately silenced, histories of the Jamaican diaspora.[1] Her personal history is inextricably linked to this narrative; as the British-born child of Jamaican parents who arrived on the MV Empire Windrush in 1948,

Levy's fiction is imbued with an autobiographical urgency.[4] Her work consistently strives to make "the invisible visible," re-inserting the experiences of Black Britons into a national story from which they have been historically excluded.[6] Across her novels, Levy critically negotiates the fraught intersections of ethnicity, race, and national identity, exploring the hybridity and "in-betweenness" that defines the Black British experience.[7]

Central to this exploration is the role of language. In the postcolonial context, language is never a neutral medium of communication; it is a primary site of power, control, and resistance.[9] For the subjects of the British Empire, the English language was both a tool of colonial administration and a vehicle for cultural imperialism, shaping consciousness and enforcing hierarchies.[10] Consequently, the linguistic choices made by postcolonial subjects—and the literary representation of those choices—are deeply political acts. This paper contends that Andrea Levy's fiction presents a nuanced spectrum of linguistic resistance, charting an evolution from strategies of survival within the colonial framework to a radical subversion of that framework itself. Her two historical novels, *Small Island* (2004) and *The Long Song* (2010), serve as a literary diptych, linking the linguistic anxieties of the 20th-century migrant directly to the foundational linguistic violence of 19th-century slavery.

This analysis advances the thesis that *Small Island* explores the individual, adaptive strategies of code-switching employed by the Windrush generation, characters caught between a colonial education that valorizes Standard English and the brutal, racist reality of the "Mother Country." Their linguistic negotiations are acts of survival, reflecting a constant battle for dignity within a hostile environment. *The Long Song*, conversely, enacts a more foundational resistance. By employing a Creole narrative voice to recount the final days of slavery in Jamaica, Levy moves beyond individual adaptation to a structural dismantling of the master's narrative. This voice embodies a collective, ancestral act of narrative reclamation, subverting the very form and language of European historiography. This progression from the situational resistance of code-switching to the structural resistance of Creole narration demonstrates a profound evolution in the articulation of a decolonized consciousness.

To substantiate this argument, this paper will first establish a theoretical framework that synthesizes sociolinguistic models of code-switching with postcolonial theories of language and power. It will then proceed to a close textual analysis, first examining the aspirational hypercorrection of Hortense and the pragmatic code-switching of Gilbert in *Small Island*. Subsequently, it will analyze the narrative voice of July in *The Long Song* as an embodiment of Kamau Brathwaite's "nation language" and a tool of historiographic metafiction. Finally, a comparative synthesis will conclude that Levy's work charts a powerful trajectory of a decolonizing voice, moving from a struggle for recognition within the colonizer's language to a triumphant reclamation of a submerged linguistic heritage as the ultimate medium of resistance.

Theoretical Framework: From Code-Switching to Nation Language

To fully apprehend the depth of Andrea Levy's linguistic project, it is necessary to construct a theoretical lens that integrates the functional descriptions of sociolinguistics with the political critique of postcolonial theory. While sociolinguistics provides the mechanics of *how* and *why* speakers alternate between linguistic codes in social interaction, postcolonial theory reveals the historical power structures that imbue those codes with meaning and consequence. Levy's fiction demands this synthesis, demonstrating that in the colonial and postcolonial context, every linguistic choice

is embedded in a history of domination and resistance.

Sociolinguistic Models of Code-Switching

Code-switching, the practice of alternating between two or more languages or language varieties in conversation, is a common behavior in bilingual and multilingual communities.[11] Sociolinguistic theories move beyond a purely structural analysis to investigate the complex social motivations that drive this behavior.[11] Speakers may switch codes to express solidarity with a social group, to establish rapport, or to signal a shared background.[15] The switch itself can be triggered by a range of factors, including a change in the situation, the topic of conversation, or the arrival of a new interlocutor.[12] Several key models offer frameworks for understanding these motivations.

Howard Giles's Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) posits that speakers adjust their speech to manage social distance.[15] *Convergence* occurs when individuals adapt their language to become more similar to their interlocutor, often to gain social approval or increase communicative efficiency. Conversely, *divergence* involves accentuating linguistic differences to emphasize social distance or group identity. This model is particularly useful for analyzing the linguistic choices of migrants seeking acceptance in a dominant culture.

Carol Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model views language choice as a rational act through which speakers mark their rights and obligations within a given interaction.[15] Speakers select a linguistic code they perceive as "unmarked" (i.e., expected) for a particular situation. A switch to a "marked" code is a deliberate negotiation of the social dynamic, intended to redefine the terms of the interaction. This framework highlights the agency of the speaker in using language to strategically position themselves.

Finally, scholars of Conversation Analysis (CA), such as Peter Auer, argue that code-switching does not merely *reflect* a pre-existing social context but actively *creates* it.[15] The focus here is on the sequential implications of a switch—how the choice of one language influences the subsequent linguistic choices of all participants. This perspective distinguishes between the "brought-along meaning" of a language (its inherent social values) and the "brought-about meaning" created by the act of switching itself, emphasizing the performative power of language in interaction.

Postcolonial Theories of Language and Power

While sociolinguistic models provide a functional grammar for code-switching, postcolonial theory exposes the political and psychological substrate upon which these functions operate. In the context of empire, the choice between the colonizer's language and a native tongue is never neutral; it is a choice freighted with the violence of history.

Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* provides a foundational psychoanalytic critique of the colonial linguistic encounter. Fanon argues that for the colonized subject, language is the primary medium through which colonial ideology is internalized.[17] He posits a psychic "fissiparousness," a splitting of the self, wherein the Black man has one mode of being with fellow Blacks and another with Whites.[17] To speak the colonizer's language is "to assume a culture and bear the weight of a civilization".[17] This leads to a profound linguistic alienation, where mastering the metropolitan language becomes synonymous with achieving humanity: "the more the black Antillean assimilates the French language, the whiter he gets—i.e., the closer he comes to becoming a true human being".[17] This process instills an inferiority complex regarding one's native language (such as Creole), which is denigrated as "broken" or "uncivilized".[17] Fanon's work thus reveals the deep psychological trauma underlying the behavior that CAT describes as

convergence; it is not merely a strategy for social approval but a desperate, often futile, attempt to be recognized as fully human within a racist system.

Building on this, Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, in *Decolonising the Mind*, conceptualizes the imposition of the colonizer's language as a "cultural bomb".[20] Its effect, he argues, "is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environments, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves".[20] For Ngũgĩ, language and culture are inseparable; language carries the values and worldview of a community.[20] Colonial education, by severing the connection between a child's language of home and the language of formal learning, creates a state of profound alienation.[20] Ngũgĩ's radical solution—his "farewell to English" and his commitment to writing in his native Gikuyu—frames the choice of linguistic medium as the central battleground for decolonization.[20]

Theorists Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, in their seminal work *The Empire Writes Back*, offer a framework for understanding how postcolonial writers resist this linguistic domination while often still writing in the imperial tongue.[24] They argue that one of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language, which installs a "standard" version as the norm and marginalizes all variants.[10] Postcolonial literature resists this by "writing back" to the imperial center, a process that involves wresting the language from the dominant culture.[9] Central to their theory is the distinction between 'English' (with a capital 'E'), the standard, normative code of the imperial center, and 'english' (with a lowercase 'e'), the myriad of transformed, appropriated, and subversive varieties that have emerged in the postcolonial world.[10] This act of appropriation transforms the language into a tool capable of expressing the distinct cultural experiences of the formerly colonized.

This process of appropriation finds its most potent articulation in the work of Barbadian poet and scholar Kamau Brathwaite, who coined the term "nation language".[26] Brathwaite explicitly rejects the term "dialect" for its pejorative connotations of being an inferior or "bad" version of Standard English.[26] Nation language, he argues, is not a dialect of English but a distinct language forged by enslaved Africans in the Caribbean. While it may use English lexical features, its essence lies in its "contours, its rhythm and its timbre, its sound explosions," which are heavily influenced by its African oral heritage.[26] It is the "submerged language" of the enslaved, a language of survival and cultural memory.[27] Brathwaite famously declared that "the hurricane does not roar in pentameters," suggesting that the imported literary forms of English are inadequate to express the realities of the Caribbean experience.[26] Following Édouard Glissant, he sees nation language as a "forced poetics," a strategic tool used by the enslaved to communicate covertly and preserve their culture under the master's gaze.[26] Brathwaite's theory provides the ultimate framework for understanding linguistic resistance not as an adaptation to a dominant system, but as the assertion of a parallel, resilient, and sovereign linguistic world.

"A Woman Such as I": Code-Switching and Aspirational Identity in *Small Island*

Andrea Levy's *Small Island* is a masterful depiction of the Windrush generation's encounter with post-war Britain, a narrative centered on the profound disjuncture between expectation and reality.[29] The Jamaican protagonists, Hortense Joseph and Gilbert Joseph, arrive in the "Mother Country" armed with a colonial education that has instilled in them an idealized image of England and a deep reverence for its culture and language.[31] They believe themselves to be British subjects, coming to the aid of a nation for which they fought in the war.[6] However, they are met not with gratitude but with pervasive racism, hostility,

and condescension. In this environment, their language—the very marker of their colonial education—becomes a primary site of conflict, negotiation, and resistance. The novel presents language as a "battleground on which British and West Indian cultures and identities clash and make accommodations".[34] Through the contrasting linguistic strategies of Hortense and Gilbert, Levy explores the complex and often painful ways in which identity is performed and contested through speech.

Andrea Levy's *Small Island* intricately explores how language mediates identity, power, and belonging in the context of post-war migration from Jamaica to Britain. Through characters like Hortense Roberts and Gilbert Joseph, Levy presents code-switching not merely as a communicative strategy but as a form of cultural negotiation and resistance. The novel's linguistic texture—alternating between Creole-inflected and Standard English narration—exposes the psychological and political tensions inherent in the colonial experience.

Hortense, with her proud declaration, "*I speak perfect English,*" embodies the internalized colonial belief that linguistic mastery equates to social advancement. Her speech, prim and meticulous, mirrors her desire to ascend into the respectability of British culture. Levy crafts Hortense's voice as rigid and formal, marked by a self-conscious distance from her Jamaican roots. For instance, when she recalls her upbringing at the missionary school, she notes with pride how she learned "*the Queen's English*," which she associates with moral superiority and refinement. Yet, as Hortense confronts post-war London's harsh racial realities—when her accent and education fail to gain her respect—the fragility of this aspirational identity becomes evident. Levy uses moments of linguistic dissonance, where Hortense's polished English contrasts sharply with the prejudice she faces, to reveal the hollowness of the colonial promise. Her "perfect English" becomes a mask that both protects and alienates her, symbolizing the psychological burden of colonial mimicry.

Gilbert Joseph, in contrast, uses language as a tool of humor, defiance, and survival. His narrative voice shifts fluidly between Jamaican Creole and Standard English, reflecting both adaptability and resistance. When Gilbert sarcastically muses, "*Me no servant. Me own the world,*" his Creole diction asserts self-worth against British condescension. Code-switching allows him to navigate two linguistic worlds: he adopts the colonizer's tongue for practicality yet reverts to Creole for authenticity and solidarity. This linguistic duality also exposes the hypocrisy of British attitudes. For instance, Gilbert's encounters with English officers during the war—where his eloquence in English is dismissed despite his service—lay bare the racist structures embedded in linguistic hierarchies. Through Gilbert, Levy reveals that code-switching is not submission but strategy: a performative means of asserting dignity within a language system designed to marginalize him.

Levy's narrative technique amplifies these tensions. She alternates perspectives, allowing readers to inhabit both Hortense's aspirational restraint and Gilbert's irreverent realism. Their voices—at times harmonious, at times clashing—mirror the diasporic negotiation between assimilation and authenticity. In the climactic moments of reconciliation between them, Levy symbolically harmonizes their linguistic worlds: Hortense's rigid English softens, while Gilbert's Creole-inflected humor bridges emotional distance. Thus, *Small Island* portrays code-switching as a linguistic mirror of postcolonial identity formation, illustrating how the colonized subject learns not just to speak, but to own the act of speaking.

Ultimately, the phrase "A woman such as I", which Hortense uses to describe her sense of self-importance, encapsulates Levy's critique of colonial aspiration. Through her journey, Levy suggests that true empowerment lies not in

mimicking the colonizer's tongue but in reconciling with one's hybrid voice—a voice that bears the rhythm of history, resistance, and belonging.

Hortense's Hypercorrection as Internalized Resistance

Hortense Joseph's speech is a carefully constructed performance of "proper" English, a linguistic embodiment of her aspirational identity. Raised by her father's respectable cousins, she internalizes the colonial values of status, education, and manners, believing them to be the keys to a "golden life".[35] Her linguistic strategy is one of hypercorrection—an exaggerated adherence to the perceived rules of the prestige dialect. Her dialogue is stilted, formal, and replete with archaic or overly elaborate phrasing. Upon arriving at Queenie's dilapidated boarding house, she does not ask where her husband is; instead, she inquires, "This is perchance where he is aboding?".[37] This use of "perchance," a word she and Gilbert learned from studying Wordsworth and Shakespeare, signals her belief in a literary, idealized England that bears no resemblance to the grim reality she encounters.[38]

Hortense's linguistic performance is deeply intertwined with an internalized colorism. She distinguishes herself from other Jamaicans based on her lighter skin—"the color of warm honey"—and her "proper" speech, believing that "no one would think to enchain someone such as I".[35] Her pride in her "well-rehearsed English accent," which she diligently cultivated by listening to the BBC, is a tool to distance herself from the "rough country way" of her grandmother and the Patois of the Jamaican working class, which she has been taught to view as inferior.[38]

Theoretically, Hortense's speech is a clear example of *convergence* as described in Giles's Communication Accommodation Theory.[15] She meticulously adapts her language to align with the prestige norm of Standard 'English' in a bid for social acceptance and to be recognized as the respectable, educated teacher she is.[40] However, when viewed through the lens of Frantz Fanon, this convergence is revealed as a symptom of profound *linguistic alienation*.[17] Hortense wears the "white mask" of "proper" English to resist the racist stereotype of the "savage" or uneducated colonial subject. Yet, in doing so, she unwittingly reinforces the very colonial hierarchy that devalues her Jamaican identity. Her resistance is internalized; it is a struggle to prove her worth according to the colonizer's standards. This strategy is shown to be tragically futile. Her landlady, Queenie, persistently asks her, "Can you understand what I'm saying?" and suggests, "You'll soon get used to our language," revealing an unshakeable prejudice that equates Black skin with linguistic incompetence, regardless of Hortense's articulacy.[38] This "silly dance of miscomprehension" demonstrates that her hypercorrect English cannot protect her from the dehumanizing gaze of racism.[34]

Gilbert's Pragmatic Code-Switching

Gilbert Joseph, in contrast to his wife, employs a more flexible and pragmatic linguistic strategy. His identity is not as rigidly tied to the performance of "proper" English; instead, he navigates the complex social landscape of post-war Britain through situational code-switching.[41] Gilbert's linguistic repertoire spans the continuum from a more formal register to a distinctly Jamaican Creole, and he shifts between them based on his audience and his emotional state. When conversing with Hortense or in formal situations, he attempts to meet her standards, but in moments of intimacy, frustration, or solidarity with fellow Jamaicans, his speech becomes more marked by the rhythms and lexicon of his native tongue.[38]

Gilbert's code-switching is a tool for survival and identity assertion. In the face of English ignorance—such as the common assumption that Jamaica is in Africa—his internal monologue and his speech to other

Jamaicans affirm a shared cultural reality that is invisible to the white British.[41] According to Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model, Gilbert's linguistic choices are rational acts that mark his identity and negotiate his social position.[15] His switch to Patois with his cousin Elwood, who warns him against going to England—"You stop run round to those fool-fool English - we gon' lick them"—is an unmarked choice that signals in-group solidarity.[38] In England, his use of Creole becomes a marked choice, a conscious act of asserting his identity in a hostile environment.

Furthermore, as per Auer's Conversation Analysis, Gilbert's switches do not just reflect his identity but actively *create* social meaning.[15] His final, powerful confrontation with the racist Bernard is a prime example. As Bernard unleashes a torrent of prejudice, Gilbert's response, delivered with "chest panting with the passion from his words," is a moment of profound dignity that finally earns Hortense's admiration.[41] In this climactic scene, his language transcends mere communication; it becomes an act of defiance, a reclamation of his humanity in the face of dehumanization. His linguistic flexibility allows him to perform different identities strategically, not for the sake of assimilation, but for the preservation of his dignity and the construction of community.

The linguistic tension between Hortense and Gilbert thus dramatizes a central debate within postcolonial thought. Hortense's assimilationist perfectionism represents the argument that liberation can be achieved by mastering the colonizer's tools, while Gilbert's pragmatic hybridity reflects a more syncretic approach that maintains a connection to one's linguistic heritage while adapting to new realities. Levy presents neither as a perfect solution, instead using their dynamic to expose the complex, often contradictory, pressures faced by a generation caught between two worlds.

"Telling Her Story for Her Amusement": Creole Narration and Historiographic Resistance in *The Long Song*"

If *Small Island* portrays the linguistic struggles of Jamaicans in the imperial metropole, *The Long Song* returns to the historical crucible where those linguistic dynamics were forged: the sugar plantations of 19th-century Jamaica. The novel is a neo-slave narrative that recounts the life of July, a house slave, during the final, turbulent years of slavery and the subsequent period of emancipation.[42] In this work, Levy's engagement with language as resistance undergoes a radical shift. The focus moves from the individual, situational code-switching of migrants to a structural, foundational act of resistance enacted through the very form and voice of the narrative itself. July's story is not merely told *in* a Jamaican voice; it is an embodiment of that voice, a literary performance that subverts the conventions of the European novel and challenges the authority of colonial historiography.

In *The Long Song*, Andrea Levy radically reimagines the relationship between language, history, and power by giving narrative authority to July, an Afro-Jamaican woman born into slavery. Through July's Creole-infused narration, Levy transforms storytelling into an act of historiographic resistance, reclaiming the silenced voices of the enslaved from colonial archives that historically rendered them voiceless. The phrase "*telling her story for her amusement*" becomes deeply ironic: July's act of narration is far more than amusement—it is reclamation, defiance, and authorship.

From the opening line, July asserts narrative control: "*This story, my story, begins before I was born…*" Her assertion challenges both the authority of historical documents and the narrative conventions of the English novel. Levy deliberately frames July as an unreliable yet sovereign narrator, whose interruptions, digressions, and self-corrections destabilize the

reader's expectations of linear history. For instance, July mocks her publisher (and by extension, the colonial reader) who wishes to "tidy up" her language, saying, "*I am not writing for your amusement, sir!*" This moment exposes the colonial tendency to domesticate subaltern speech, transforming it into palatable, "proper" English. By refusing such sanitization, July's Creole voice performs linguistic rebellion—it affirms the validity of "nation language," to borrow Kamau Brathwaite's term, as a medium of historical truth.

Levy's prose in *The Long Song* mirrors the oral storytelling traditions of Caribbean culture. July's speech is rhythmic, rich in repetition, humor, and proverb—traits associated with African diasporic orality. Her use of phrases like "*Lawd, what a day that was!*" or "*Me never forget the sound of she crying*" infuses the narrative with emotional immediacy and authenticity, bridging the gap between collective memory and individual experience. This Creole narration transforms the act of remembering into resistance: July's voice refuses the linguistic erasure that accompanied enslavement.

Moreover, July's storytelling exposes the distortions of colonial historiography. She recounts events such as the Baptist War and the transition from slavery to emancipation not as detached facts but as lived trauma and survival. Her tone oscillates between irony and outrage, especially when recounting the hypocrisies of the white overseers or the "kindness" of her former mistress, Caroline Mortimer. July's mocking commentary—"*Miss Mortimer did cry as if her heart break, though me never see her shed one tear for a Negro child*"—reveals her mastery of satire, transforming her subaltern perspective into a critical historiographic lens.

Levy's use of the epistolary framing device—July's story edited by her son, Thomas Kinsman—adds another layer of resistance. Thomas's educated English serves as a contrast to his mother's Creole, highlighting generational and linguistic tensions. Yet July's voice ultimately dominates, defying editorial containment. Her story ends not in submission but in affirmation: the act of storytelling itself becomes her freedom.

In *The Long Song*, Levy thus crafts Creole not as broken English but as a language of liberation, capable of bearing the weight of memory, humor, and critique. July's narration transforms the enslaved subject from object to author, challenging colonial histories written "about" rather than "by" the oppressed. Through her, Levy reclaims linguistic space for the Caribbean woman whose story, once silenced, now commands the reader's attention with irreverent, unrestrained vitality.

Jamaican Patois as a Language of Resistance

The linguistic context of *The Long Song* is Jamaican Patois, a Creole language born from the violent collision of cultures during the slave trade.[45] Forcibly removed from diverse linguistic backgrounds in West and Central Africa, enslaved people were compelled to communicate using the English of their enslavers.[46] From this necessity, a new language emerged—one that retained the syntax, phonology, and rhythmic sensibilities of African languages while using a largely English-derived lexicon.[45] This Creole, or Patois, was more than a means of communication; it was a tool of survival, a medium for forging a new, shared identity, and a vehicle for covert resistance.[45] It was a language in which the enslaved could communicate with each other, often in the presence of their masters, without being fully understood, thereby creating a space of cultural and psychological autonomy.[50] This history imbues the language with an inherent politics of resistance, making Levy's choice to center it in her narrative a profoundly decolonizing act.

July's Narrative Voice as 'Nation Language'

The most radical aspect of *The Long Song* is its narrative voice. July's account of her life is not rendered in the Standard English typical of historical fiction. Instead, her narration is infused with the cadence, syntax, and spirit of

Jamaican Creole, representing a literary actualization of Kamau Brathwaite's "nation language".[26] This is not simply the inclusion of dialect in dialogue; the entire narrative consciousness is shaped by an oral, performative tradition.[51] July frequently breaks the fourth wall, addressing the reader directly with phrases like, "As your storyteller, I am to convey...".[52] Her storytelling is non-linear, digressive, and associative, mirroring the patterns of oral history rather than the teleological structure of the European novel.[54]

This voice is intimate, humorous, and profane—a stark contrast to the solemn, victim-focused tone of many traditional slave narratives.[51] Levy consciously sought to move beyond the "morality play" of slavery, with its "voiceless victims," to recover the "chatter and clatter of people building their lives... in appallingly difficult circumstances".[55] July's voice, with its lilting patois and defiant personality, achieves precisely this. It is a voice that, in Brathwaite's terms, "largely ignores the pentameter" of standard English literary tradition and instead follows the "contours" and "sound explosions" of Caribbean speech.[26] By centering this "submerged language," Levy elevates it from a "dialect" to the legitimate medium of historical record, asserting its power to articulate the full complexity of the Jamaican experience.

Historiographic Metafiction as Counter-Discourse

Levy further weaponizes July's narrative through the use of historiographic metafiction, a technique that self-consciously exposes the constructed nature of history and fiction.[57] The novel is framed by the editorial interventions of July's son, Thomas Kinsman, a printer who is attempting to shape his mother's unruly memories into a respectable, linear memoir.[54] This framing creates a central conflict between July's oral, Creole-inflected storytelling and Thomas's desire for a narrative that conforms to the conventions of the English printed word.

July is a deliberately unreliable narrator. She offers multiple, contradictory versions of key events, such as her own birth, first presenting an "ornate invention" before conceding the "noisy, messy truth".[51] She openly admits to the reader that she is telling the story for her "own amusement" and attempts to give it a "happiest of endings," only to be corrected by her son, who forces her to recount more painful truths.[52] This narrative strategy is a powerful form of *counter-discourse*.[59] By foregrounding the subjectivity and fallibility of her own account, July implicitly critiques the master narratives of colonial history. These official histories, presented as objective and factual, are revealed to be just as constructed, but with an agenda of erasure and domination. July's story is a corrective to the "dominant white narratives of Caribbean history," the "legends told whilst pointing at the portraits or bust in any fancy great house".[58]

July's resistance, therefore, operates on a much deeper level than Hortense's. Hortense resists a racist *stereotype* by attempting to perfectly conform to the colonizer's linguistic *standard*. Her struggle is for inclusion within an existing system. July, on the other hand, resists the *standard itself*. Her narrative challenges the legitimacy of the European historical novel as the sole vehicle for truth and asserts the validity of her own linguistic and narrative traditions. Her struggle with her son is a microcosm of the larger decolonial struggle: a fight against the sanitization and ordering of a lived, chaotic, Creole experience into a neat, "proper" English narrative. In this way, *The Long Song* does not merely seek a place in the colonial archive; it seeks to dismantle it and build a new one, founded on the authority of the submerged voice.

The following table provides a concise comparative summary of these distinct strategies:

Character	Novel	Primary Linguistic Strategy	Theoretical Framework	Function as Resistance
Hortense	*Small Island*	Hypercorrection; formal Standard English	Fanon (Linguistic Alienation); Giles (Convergence)	**Internalized Resistance:** Resists stereotypes of inferiority but reinforces colonial linguistic norms.
Gilbert	*Small Island*	Situational Code-Switching (Jamaican Creole / Standard English)	Myers-Scotton (Markedness); Auer (Conversation Analysis)	**Pragmatic Resistance:** Navigates hostile spaces, asserts identity, and builds in-group solidarity.
July	*The Long Song*	Creole-infused Narration ("Nation Language")	Brathwaite (Nation Language); Ashcroft et al. ("Writing Back")	**Structural Resistance:** Subverts the slave narrative genre and reclaims historical voice from colonial erasure.

By juxtaposing the post-war London of *Small Island* with the pre-emancipation Jamaica of *The Long Song*, Andrea Levy constructs a powerful literary arc that maps the evolution of linguistic resistance within the Black diaspora. The journey from Hortense Joseph's strained and proper English to July's defiant Creole narration is not merely a shift in literary style; it is a profound statement on the process of decolonization. Levy demonstrates that the struggle for voice is a historical continuum, where the psychological anxieties of the 20th-century migrant are the direct inheritance of the systemic violence enacted upon their 19th-century ancestors.

The linguistic strategies employed by the characters in Small Island are fundamentally strategies of negotiation. Hortense's hypercorrection is an attempt to negotiate for respectability and humanity within a system that denies her both. It is an act of resistance against the stereotype of the ignorant colonial, but it is a resistance conducted entirely on the colonizer's terms, tragically reinforcing the very linguistic hierarchy that oppresses her. Gilbert's code-switching is a more agile negotiation, a pragmatic tool for navigating hostile spaces, building community, and asserting his dignity in moments of conflict. His is a voice of resilience and adaptation, a testament to the agency required to survive in the metropole. Yet, both characters operate within the dominant linguistic framework of 'English,' their choices circumscribed by its power. The Long Song, in contrast, presents a strategy of reclamation. July's narrative does not negotiate with the master's language; it displaces it. By embodying Kamau Brathwaite's "nation language," her voice asserts a different linguistic center, one rooted in African oral traditions and forged in the crucible of slavery. Her use of historiographic metafiction is a direct assault on the epistemological foundations of colonial history, challenging its claims to objectivity and truth. July's voice is the "submerged" voice of the diaspora finally rising to the surface, not to ask for a place at the table of English literature, but to set her own table and tell her own story in her own tongue.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Andrea Levy's fiction powerfully affirms that the path to decolonization is as much linguistic as it is

political. Across *Small Island* and *The Long Song*, Levy explores how language becomes both a tool of survival and a weapon of resistance against the oppressive legacies of colonialism. In *Small Island*, Gilbert and Hortense exemplify two distinct yet interwoven responses to linguistic and cultural displacement. Gilbert's humorous, often self-aware use of code-switching exposes the contradictions of empire and asserts his dignity within a society that seeks to silence him. His speech oscillates between Jamaican Creole and formal English, symbolizing his struggle for acceptance and his refusal to surrender his identity. Hortense, on the other hand, embodies the internal conflict of a colonized mind aspiring toward English propriety. Her deliberate suppression of Creole and insistence on "proper English" reveal the psychological toll of colonial education—yet her eventual confrontation with the realities of racism in England pushes her toward self-realization and a subtle reclamation of her own voice.

In *The Long Song*, Levy extends this linguistic struggle into a form of narrative liberation. Through July's bold, Creole-infused storytelling, she reclaims history from the margins. July's defiant, unreliable, and rhythmically vibrant voice stands as an act of rebellion against both the silence imposed by slavery and the linguistic hegemony of colonial discourse. Her "nation language" refuses translation, asserting the authenticity of a people whose voices history tried to erase.

Together, Gilbert's wit, Hortense's evolving consciousness, and July's audacious narration illuminate Levy's vision of resistance through speech. Through their voices, Levy demonstrates that true decolonization does not merely involve political independence but the reclamation of linguistic identity. In her fiction, resistance lies not only in what is said but in how it is spoken—the cadence, the code, and the Creole pulse that beat defiantly against the boundaries of empire.

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