

Analysis of Cultural Features in the French Translation of Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*

Soyinka's literary works have been areas of interest for most African scholars because of his concentration on culture. But, the issues of cultural stance in Soyinka's French translation of The lion and jewel have not been treated immensely. This study therefore, aims at analysing some cultural features in the French translation of Soyinka's The lion and the jewel. The play is written by Wole Soyinka in (1963) and translated into French as Le lion et la perle (1968) by Jacques Chuto and Phillippe Labuthe-Tolra. In this study, Random sampling technique is used to select the data based on the linearity of the cultural features in the drama text. The study therefore, employs descriptive and comparative research methods in analysing the data based on cultural features in our selected text. We adopt Nida's Dynamic Equivalent Theory of Translation (1964); the theory underscores a more natural rendering but with less literary accuracy and the theory reiterates that the closest natural equivalence (cultural and linguistic) must be maintained in the target language. The study concludes that culture-bound items of the source text can only be translated fairly if the translator can be more conversant about the cultures involved in the translation. The study as well, concludes that there is no short cut in translation of cultural items than to make use of direct translation techniques and the use of annotative devices.

Keywords: Culture, drama, equivalence, feature, *The lion and the jewel*

Introduction

Drama as one of the genres of literature is to be performed on stage; this makes it unique among other genres of literature. Since drama involves performance, its translation needs to be accompanied with the source text attributes in the target text. A well translated drama text is expected to have the artistic and aesthetic qualities of the source text. Drama translation is therefore, impossible without relating it within the socio-cultural context which conceived it. A translator has to choose words that are easily pronounceable by actors and comprehensible to the audience. Drama texts are full of performances and playability therefore; their translations must involve general knowledge of literature because of the presence of the literary and dramatic elements. It is observed that scholars consider less the translation of drama texts. Yet, drama texts cannot be translated like other genres of literature- prose and poetry. It is distinctly known that the three major genres of literature cannot be read in the same manner. Reading of plays or drama texts is quite different from that of other genres. Some parts of artistic works of play create an unending suspense which if a translator is not conversant with that, he or she may not be able to translate or to justify the message of the source texts. In theatrical semiotics, the linguistic system is only one (optional) component in a set of interrelated systems that comprises the audience. Drama texts are full of dialogues, rhythm, intonations, patterns, pitch, loudness and other dramatic

elements. A drama text translator needs to be abreast of all the characteristics of drama and the effects of performance. This is very vital because there are complex tasks in determining the criteria for the translating a drama text. In fact, the translation of plays has been faced with a lot of challenges and criticism, in the sense that the translation being too literal, full of loan-words and unperformable as the original.

According to Komissarov (1991: 5) "In translating a play, the translator must bear in mind the requirements of theatrical presentation of such play; at all times, the translator must hear the voice that speaks and take into consideration the 'gesture' of the language, all rhythms and pauses that occur when the written text is spoken". This shows that drama as a genre of literature is distinctly different from other genres because of its involvement in *actions*. The translator of a drama text must put the actions in his mind in order not to miss out the aesthetics and embellishments of the source text in the target text. According to Savory (1957:54) "a translation may include any of the idiomatic expressions which is peculiar to its language and which the translator sees fit to adopt; but it needs not, because of this, possess the style which the reader may expect". In Holmes' view (1970:79), the points of difference between the author of the original and the translator are perhaps, another way of viewing Dynamic Equivalence as an objective criterion of translation quality:

The differences between the author and the translator are governed by the differing social and literary situations. The conventional designation of which is the taste of the day. In practice, these differences between the original and the translation can be reduced to shifts in the structural process. Each individual method of translation is determined by the presence or absence of shifts in the various layers of the translation. All that appears as new with respect to the original, or fails to appear where it might have been expected, may be interpreted as a shift. The fact that the process of translation involves shifts in the semantic properties of the text does not mean that the translator wishes to underemphasise the semantic appeal of the original. The very opposite is true.

Like Nida's concept, which reiterates sequence of translation shift, Dynamic Equivalence in translation should not only be intelligible or understandable to communication information, but also enable receptors to feel what is communicated and to response in action. The same term is examined by Holmes in his quotation; he keeps the idea of structural process in translation. He remarks that there is tendency to have a shift in the process of translation but this does not show that the translator cannot insist on the semantic appeal of the original. In fact, translation shift is inevitable but the ability to manage such shift matters most. It is one thing to make a shift, it is another thing to be able to maintain it so that it will not change the source text's meaning and it will take care of the target audience. The content of the source text must be maintained in the target text. This shows that, in translation we are not translating words of a language but the messages combined by words. As words are more meaningful when they are used in context than being analysed solely, the same ideology is related to the issue of inferring

meanings to be able to translate a text, meanings should not be inferred from words individually but justice must be done according to the way words are used in contexts.

Problems Relating to the Translation of Drama Texts

Many translation scholars have made different relevant assertions as regard the problems facing the translations of drama texts. It is crystal clear that every genre of literature poses some specific problems of translating into a particular language and drama translation is not an exception. The fundamental fact about the problems of translating drama texts or plays is that the tasks are related to cultural, linguistic and performative issues. Many literary translations fail to achieve the fame and quality of the original texts as a result of some factors relating to the reality above.

As well, there is a problem of false friends (*faux-amis*) as it is rampant in general translation. As well, too much of aesthetics and embellishments bring about translation loss in drama texts. In plays, proper names are normally reformed to suit both the graphic and phonic instances of the source text but most often it brings about contradictions. There is also a problem of mistranslation of information, sub-interpretation of the original text and as well superficial interpretation of connections between intentional correlatives. Drama text cannot be translated in the same way as the prose text. The reason behind this is that, it involves action and performance. According to Steiner (1975:396):

A bad translation is one which is inadequate to its source-text for reasons which can be legion and obvious. The translator has misconstrued the original through ignorance, haste, or personal limitation. He lacks the mastery of his own language required for adequate representation. He has made a stylistic or psychological blunder in choosing his text; his own sensibility and that of the author whom he is translating are discordant. Where there is difficulty, the bad translator elides or paraphrases. Where there is elevation he inflates and where author offends he smoothes.

The perception of Steiner from the above excerpt concerning the problem relating to translation is that a bad translation moves far from the concept of the source text as a result of misconception or ignorance, haste and some other reasons that can come up against the translator. Perhaps, the translator lacks the knowledge of the languages involved. When a translator cannot study the source-text message, invariably, one or two problems can set in. He or she needs to consider first the target audiences. The human translators need to study the cultural background of the target readers. Kolawole and Moruwawon (2007: 375-379) are of the opinion that “the translator had the responsibility of finding a solution to the most daunting problems, and he declared that the functional view must be adopted with regard not only to meaning but also to style and form.” The above quotation reiterates the relevance of style and form

in translation; Kolawole and Moruwawon explicate the solution to the most daunting problems of translation which is to adopt not only meaning but also the stylistic preoccupation. Furthermore, the methodology used in translating prose is used to translate drama texts too by some translators.

Among the problems of translating drama text is the transfer of culture. The concept which belongs relatively to a given culture often does not have lexical correspondences in the target civilisation. Furthermore, Nord (1991) categorises the problems of translating drama into different phases- as pragmatic problems which is referred to the fact that there may be difference between the situations in the source and target cultures. The difference include time, place, etc. in order to identify potential pragmatic problems; we need to check the extra textual factors for each text. He further states that, there are linguistic problems as most scholars emphasise. These arise as a result of difference in structure, vocabulary and syntax of SL and TL. Coupled with other problems of translating drama is the cultural issue. According to Nord, cultural problems are the results of the differences in norms and conventions that guide verbal and non-verbal behaviours in two cultures involved, as every culture has its own habits and conventions.

Dynamic Equivalence Theory

The theory is referred to as a general theory of translation because it can be adopted to analyse diverse features in translation. It is equally the pioneer theory of translation which is employed in the translation of Holy Bible. Eugene Nida started the movement of the theory since 1943 until it was formally in vogue in 1964. According to Nida and Taber (1969:12) “the theory suggests that a Dynamic Equivalence Theory is to produce in the receptor language, the closest natural equivalence of the source-language message.” The key words are ‘closest’, ‘natural’ and ‘equivalence’. By ‘closest’, they indicate that owing to the impossibility of absolute equivalence, the closest equivalence is the ideal one. Nida’s definitions of Dynamic Equivalence Theory in 1964 consider cultural implications for translation. In his view, “A gloss translation mostly typifies formal equivalence where form and content are reproduced as faithfully as possible and the TL reader is able to “understand as much as he can of the customs, manner of thought, and means of expression” of the SL context. Contrasting with this idea, dynamic equivalence, tries to relate the receptor to modes of behaviour relevant within the context of his own culture” without insisting that the “understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context.” According to him problems may vary in scope depending on the cultural and linguistic gap between the two (or more) languages involved in translation. In this case, a literal translation (formal equivalence) does not mean anything in a different culture, so the dynamic equivalence is necessary. The theory is interested in effect of the translation on the target readers which is the same as the effect of the source text on the source readers.

Analysis of Cultural Features in the French Translation of Soyinka's *The lion and the jewel*

Translation of Proverbs

In the play, *The lion and the jewel*, there exists a lot of cultural elements and these elements are presented in the translated version of the play. One of the cultural features identified from the text is the use of proverbs. Different proverbs are attached to different tribes and communities. Proverbs are rich among the Yoruba tribe, the proverbs, as they believe, serve as their values and treasures which can be referred to when there is a problem or conflict among them. Yorubas often say “òwe n’eshin òrò, òrò n’eshin òwe, bí òrò bá sonù òwe ni a nfí wá a. Proverbs are invaluable for giving pieces of advice, for entertainment, for dialectical purpose, for didactic function, for satirising and for educating. Without mincing any word, traditional Yoruba proverbs are idiomatic in nature and its application cannot be seen as ordinary. In this study and the scrupulous study of our texts (source and target texts), it could be observed that Soyinka makes use of different proverbs to drive home his messages to the audience. The Yoruba oriented proverbs are translated into English so as to align with the language used by the playwright and to give room for the translators to work on the proverbs accordingly. Equally, Chuto and Laburthe-Tolra translate them from English into French to ensure the understanding of the French target audience. For the purpose of our analysis, the following proverbs from the source text are translated into French.

- i. **Lakunle:** This is what the stewpot said to the fire, have you no shame. (p.2)
Lakunle: C’est ce que la marmite disait au feu: N’as-tu pas honte. (p.8)
- ii. **Lakunle:** Charity they say begins at home. (p.5)
Lakunle: Charité bien ordonnée, dit-on, commerce par soi-même. (p.11)
- iii. **Sidi:** If the snail finds splinters in his shell, he changes house. (p.6)
Sidi: Si l’escargot trouve des échardes dans sa coquille, il déménage. (p.13)
- iv. **Baroka:** But the monkey sweats, my child, the monkey sweats, it is only the hair upon his back which still deceives the world. (p.54)
Baroka: Mais le singe sue, et seul le pelage sur son dos fait illusion au monde. (p.67)

1 **v.** **Sidi:** The fox is said to be wise, so cunning that he stalks and dines
2 on new-hatched chickens. (p.46)

3
4 **Sidi:** On dit que le Renard est si avisé, si rusé qu'il fait son dîner de
5 poussins à peine sortis de l'œuf! (p.59)

6
7 From the five proverbs above, it can be deduced that the proverbs are
8 purely indigenous but they are translated into French language. In the French
9 translations of the proverbs, it is observed that attempts are made to translate
10 the proverbs words-for-words and calque. The translators hardly find the
11 cultural equivalence of the proverbs except in one of the proverbs.

12
13 Charity they say begins at home. (p.5)

14 Charité bien ordonnée, dit-on, commerce par soi-même. (p.11)

15
16 The above proverb has the cultural equivalence among the French
17 speakers. From the above proverb, there is a direct equivalence in different
18 languages. For instance, Yoruba equivalence of the proverb is "ilé ni a tí ñ kò
19 èso lo sí òde" therefore, the equivalence of the proverb is very easy to discover,
20 possibly, it is because it is a common proverb. Most often, in the French
21 translation of the above proverbs, the translators explore translations as
22 applicable to them. Several occasions, the translators make use of adaptation.
23 The translators adapt to the proverbs that can be understood by the target
24 audience. In essence, the target audience is adequately cared for. For instance:

25
26 If the snail finds splinters in his shell, he changes house. (p.6)

27 Si l'escargot trouve des échardes dans sa coquille, il déménage. (p.13)

28
29 The translators employ word-for-word approach of translation; there is
30 frequent use of direct techniques of translation such as calque, borrowing and
31 literal translation technique. This implies that if the snail finds cracks in his
32 shell, it changes its shell. This is a matter of security on the part of the snail.
33 The translators translate connotatively in order to explicate the message of the
34 source text. In a linguistic and pragmatic consensus, the interpretation of
35 proverbs depends on the knowledge of the speakers and the hearers of the
36 proverbs. Therefore, proverbs must be translated to focus on the target
37 audience that understands the target language. Already, the source message of
38 the source language must be comprehended by the source audience; another
39 one is to satisfy the entire target audience.

40 Furthermore, in Africa, we have some proverbs which are based on animals;
41 our fore-fathers made use of animals as symbols of proverbs to depict an
42 allegory of ideas to solve different issues. In this study, most of the assumed
43 proverbs are animal based. For instance:

44
45 But the monkey sweats, my child, the monkey sweats,
46 it is only the hair upon his back which still deceives the

1 world. (p.54)

2 Mais le singe sue, et seul le pelage sur son dos fait illusion
3 au monde. (p.67)

4
5 In the above proverb/wise-saying, Yoruba used to say that “Adie n là ágùn,
6 ìyè ni kò jé ká mò” but, as translated in this study, Soyinka makes use of
7 monkey. For instance, naturally, monkey has more hair that may not allow
8 anyone to know it is sweating. In essence, what matters most in the translation
9 of proverbs is the ability to decode what it is meant to be. In the translation of
10 proverbs, it is expedient to search for equivalent proverb that can describe the
11 same or similar situation in the target language culture. It is allowed to
12 paraphrase the proverbs so as to describe the messages and the contents of the
13 proverb in the target text. In the translation of proverbs what matters most is
14 the message. Nobody is interested in the style at which the proverbs emanate.
15 This is suggested by the Nida in his theory. A translator needs to be dynamic to
16 be able to be able to produce an acceptable translation. Therefore, the
17 translation of proverbs is not impossible but the appropriate choice of words
18 will be an added advantage to translating the proverbs. With that, proverb
19 comprehension will not be a difficult task for the target audience and as well
20 for the translators who want to translate proverbs either from African language
21 or other languages into foreign language. In addition, it should be noted that
22 proverbs are attached to culture. Proverbs range from one culture to another.
23 As a result of this, translators must have interest in a language alone but they
24 must be interested in the culture of a language. This is the reason culture is
25 inseparable from translation. Many translators mistranslate because they do not
26 have the profound knowledge of the cultures of the languages involved in their
27 translations. Therefore, a translator should be acquainted with the cultures and
28 the cultural values of both the source and the target languages. The above is
29 buttressed by Nida’s Dynamic Equivalent Theory; the theory reiterates that the
30 closest natural equivalence (cultural and linguistic) must be maintained in the
31 target language.

34 **Translation of Songs**

35
36 Another culture-specific item identified in this study is the use of different
37 songs most especially Yoruba songs. Contemporary songs are in different
38 forms, they appear depending on one culture or the other. In Nigeria for
39 instance, Yoruba traditional songs are different from Hausa songs and that of
40 Igbo. In this study, most of the songs are originally composed in Yoruba
41 language; the songs reflect the background of the playwright. In African
42 literature, songs take integral parts in drama and the translation of songs from
43 indigenous languages to foreign languages is not impossible. This depends on
44 the cultural awareness; coupled with the understanding of the values of the
45 tribes involved. A translator must as well, have the musical knowledge; this is
46 because the translated songs may be subjected to singing therefore, it must

match with the original songs. The songs in our study are contemporary ones and they need contemporary approaches to score out the songs in translation. The tune of the translated songs must be in line with that of the source songs. The rhythm of the songs needs to be considered as well, to be able to produce it for singing.

- I.** You are dressed like him
 You look like him
 You speak his tongue
 You think like him
 You're just as clumsy
 In your Lagos ways
 You'll do for him (p.14)

Chuto and Laburthe-Tolra's Translation

Tu t'habilles comme lui
 Et tu lui ressembles
 Tu parles comme lui
 Et comme lui tu penses
 Empoté comme lui
 À la mode de Lagos
 T'es juste celui qu'il faut! (p.21)

In the first song, the presentation of the French translation of the song is a bit unique in the sense that it seems natural as presented in the source text. The translators, despite the fact that they are not natives of the environment where Yoruba is spoken, they go beyond literal translation of the Yoruba song. They consider the recipients of the translated work by appropriate choice of words to suit the target audience. As a matter of fact, in drama, songs are not just presented in a written form, they are meant to be sung and performed. The beauty of songs is to bring out the message and the melody that can go in line with the intrigue of the drama. Considering the musical tempo of the above songs (both the source and the target songs), the two songs seem to have the same tempo. Therefore, we can have the same rhythm for them because of they have the same length. by musicality, we mean phonological features that contribute to the sum total of the original meaning, can be music in the conventional sense of the word, with all those qualities associated with what is mellifluous, melodious or pleasing to ear" In the above song, the composition of its lines may probably make the song pleasing to ears.

- II.** N'ijo itoro
 Amuda el
 Ebe laiya
 Abe je on'ipa, etc. (p.23)

Chuto and Laburthe-Tolra's Translation

N'ijo itoro
Amuda el
Ebe laiya
Abe je on'ipa, etc. (p.23)

III. Yokolú yokolú
Kò ha tán bí
Ìyàwó gb'oko san'le
Oko yo'ké..... (p.44)

Chuto and Laburthe-Tolra's Translation

Yokolou, yokolou
Kò ha tán bí
Ìyàwó gb'oko san'le
Oko yo'ké..... (p.57)

IV. Mo te 'ni. Mo te 'ni
Mo te 'ni. Mo te 'ni
Sún mó mi, wè mó mi
Sún mó mi, wè mó mi
Yàràbí lo m'eyi t'o le d'omo

Tolani Tolani
T'emi ni T'emi ni
Sún mó mi, wè mó mi
Sún mó mi, wè mó mi
Yàràbí lo m'eyi t'o le d'omo. (p.64)

Chuto and Laburthe-Tolra's Translation

Mo te 'ni. Mo te 'ni
Mo te 'ni. Mo te 'ni
Sún mó mi, wè mó mi
Sún mó mi, wè mó mi
Yàràbí lo m'eyi t'o le d'omo.
Tolani Tolani
T'emi ni T'emi ni
Sún mó mi, wè mó mi
Sún mó mi, wè mó mi

Yàràbí lo m'eyi t'ò le d'omo. (Pp.77-78)

In the second, third and fourth songs, it is observed that Jacques Chuto and Laburthe-Tolra do not translate the Yoruba songs into the target text. This goes in line with the Nida's Dynamic Equivalent Theory of Translation. The translation of a text affect the way in which such text is perceived and therefore, there is re-writing of the original through the reformation in another language. Nida affirms the use of translator's note like Derrida's theory of deconstructionism which can be in form of footnotes, endnotes, glossary and other illustrative devices. Therefore, the translators of the text execute Nida's suggestion, in order to avoid translation loss; they leave the song untranslated (Untranslatability). At the end of the play, particularly the translated text, there is an explanation of the Yoruba words and expressions in the songs. The translation of songs is technical, technical in the sense that, the tempo of the songs in the source text must be the same tempo in the target text. In the course of translating, the translator should maintain the tempo of the song in the original language in the target language in order to present an acceptable translation. This shows that the translators of the play make sure the messages through songs were passed to the entire audience.

A translator of songs written in another language should understand such indigenous language of the target audience very well in term of vocabulary, structure, semantics, etc, before embarking on the translation of the text into any foreign language of his/her choice. In the French translation of Yoruba songs, there are cases of untranslatability. This is common in the translated version to be able to maintain the naturalness of the messages from the source text to the target text.

Translation of Satire/Humour in Cultural Performance

Satire/humour can be analysed based on their cultural and linguistic features. Satire is a literary piece in which vices, follies, abuses and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of individuals or corporations, government or society for improvement, it is a normally humorous for social criticism. Satire is meant to correct the bad behaviours in the society; it can be in forms of humour, irony, sarcasm, parody, burlesque, exaggeration, juxtaposition, comparison and analogy. The use of satire is common in our chosen text, and it is translated into French. The translation of satire needs skills for its implementation especially the ones which are culturally inclined. For instance:

Fakounle: No, no, I've never been drunk in all my life

Sidi: We know but your father drank so much, he must have drunk share, and that of his great grandsons. (p.13)

Chuto and Laburthe-Tolra's Translation

Fakounle: Non, non. Je n'ai jamais été soûl de ma vie.

Sidi: On sait. Mais ton père buvait tellement qu'il
a sûrement bu pour tous ses arrière-neveux.
(p.20)

It can be remarked that the literary arts of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn or indignation. The same ideology is portrayed in the play *The lion and the jewel*, the use of satire is very common. Satire begins with Fakounle and Sidi and between Fakounle and Baroka. The translation of satire such as humour, irony, parody, etc, is possibly easy provided the translator can exercise his or her language expertise on the translation of such literary piece. In particular, the French translation of satire as portrayed in the *Le lion et la perle* is embedded with the use of *formal equivalence*, a segment in the functional theory in this study, which reiterates that, the messages of the source text can be translated with the use of sense for sense translation (word-for-word). For instance:

Sidi: We know but your father drank so much, he
must have drunk the share, and that of his great
grand sons. (p.13)

Sidi: On sait mais ton père buvait tellement qu'il
a sûrement bu pour tous ses arrière-neveux.
(p.20)

Studying the above extract in the French translation, the translators make use of word-for-word technique of translation. The purpose of this is to convey the meanings of the source messages into the target text. In the translation of any type of satire, a translator must be versatile and must be able to study and read between the lines to be able to ascertain the message and the purpose of using such satire at that particular time. Satire is put in place in the work of arts to be able to create effects. The effects of satire must be reflected in the translated version. We reiterate the translation of satire under cultural features because of it involves performance in the play. Humour can be cultural most often because the audience can understand the content of the humour based on their cultural understanding.

Conclusion

As portrayed by the Dynamic Theory of Translation which is interested in the close natural equivalence of the messages of the source text in the target text; it is observed the two translators make use of direct techniques of

translation to translate the culture-bound items into to the target language to fulfill the theory's suggestion. Apart from that, most of the songs are originally composed in Yoruba language; the songs reflect the background of the playwright. In African literature, the translation of songs from indigenous languages to foreign languages is not impossible as application to this study. Therefore, the translators of the text execute Derrida's suggestion, in order to avoid translation loss; they leave the song untranslated. At the end of the play, particularly the translated text, there is an explanation of the Yoruba words and expressions in the songs. The translation of songs is technical, technical in the sense that, the tempo of the songs in the source text must be the same tempo in the target text but the translators do just to their translation. The study concludes that culture-bound items of the source text can only be translated fairly, if the translator can be more conversant of the cultures involved in the translation. The study as well, concludes that there is no short cut in translation of cultural items than to make use of direct translation techniques and the use of annotative devices.

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