ASPECTS OF TEXTUALITY IN THE FRENCH TRANSLATION OF CHINUA ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART[1]

Abstract: *The search for equivalence in translation from the cultural and stylistic point of view constitutes a problem in literary translation. This paper analyses Michel Ligny's translation of Achebe's text into English. This paper analyses the transfer of textual, cultural, historical and sociological concepts as well as acceptability in the target language in terms of norms that constitute a narrative of history. The paper adopts the new historicism as a conceptual framework, which considers history as a type of narrative whose existence is closely related to its textuality. The comparative analysis of the source and the target text reveals that full translation equivalence is achievable through proper understanding of the linguistic and cultural features of Things Fall Apart. The paper concludes that the translation of African literary texts should be carried out through adequate knowledge of African language and culture so as to take into account cultural, linguistic and sociological concepts of the original text in the target text.*

Keywords: *Textuality, Charactonyms, Songs, Translation, Culture.*

Historical Concept of Text

A text is a linguistic structure possessing a cluster of seven characteristics, that is, cohesion, coherence, acceptability, intentionality, informativeness, contextuality and intertextuality. A text is a series of sentences arranged in time and place. The most authoritative approach to classification of text is derived from text-linguistics and generally takes the shape of a taxonomy of text-types, text-forms and text-samples. Werlich (1976) characterized text-types as "idealized norms of distinctive text structuring and proposed a five-fold typology: description, narration, exposition, argumentation and instruction." The classification is maintained by Zydatiss (1983), but Hatim (1984) conflates the first three types into a single category: expository. Text-forms take a have large range applicability. A text may consist of different text-types; for instance, instruction manual, may be expository and descriptive as well as instructional. House (1981) classifies her texts for analysis into two "macro-functions", ideational and interpersonal, subdividing them into notional category: technical and non technical fictional and non fictional. It can be argued that all discourse fulfils both an interpersonal function since the speaker (addresser) must have something to say (message) and ultimately someone to say it to (the addressee). Indeed, the theoretical postulation of House's classification is at odds with her earlier definition of translations as "the

[1] **Samuel Babatunde MORUWAWON**, University of Ado Ekiti, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria, West Africa. tmoruwawon@yahoo.com

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replacement of a text in the source language by a semantically and pragmatically equivalent text in the target language" (ibid.: 29-30).

If a translation is an act of communication, a text is no less a unit of language in use. A further difficulty with House scheme is that poetic-aesthetic texts find no place in the classification since they are more "form-oriented than interpersonal and when rendered into target language becomes no longer a translation but a kind of creative transposition" (ibid.: 69). Van den Broeck (1986:38) affirms that the concept of macro-speech act as one of the bases for distinguishing different types of discourse: assertive discourse, the global function of which consists of describing or representing states of affairs in a real or possible world, and reflexive, ritual, or poetic discourse in which the utterance itself is focused on for its own sake. Such a rough classification as this oversimplifies things as they really are. The analysis of text as objects under observation "has long historical concept in modern linguistics, rooted in Firth's contextual situation and developing via Jakobson's language in operation" into Labor's conception of "discourse analysis as an investigation of the rules of language in action". A fundamental principle in such an approach to language in its social context is the primacy of the linguistic and extra-linguistic context as Halliday (1978:28) affirms that language comes to life only when functioning in some environment, and that we do not experience language in isolation but always in relation to a scenario.

Written texts are linguistic signs, which can be identified with given situations. De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) affirm that text as a linguistic structure possessing a cluster of seven characteristics: cohesion, coherence, acceptability, intentionality, informativeness, contextuality and intertextuality. This linguistic structure constitutes the core of historical narratives. Hyden White (1973:ix) describes the historical work as a "verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse". New historical theorists like Hayden White, Louis Montrose, Dominick Lacapra, and Serpil Oppermann, emphasise the textuality of history. They claim that the only way to have access to events and information about the past is through written texts. Berrin Aksoy (2001:195).

That purpose cannot be served by searching for historical facts outside the text since history is shaped in written narratives, Oppermann (1999:4) claims that the content of historical texts cannot be separated form their form. Post-modern theorists of history do not regard the text as a consistent unity that reflects a reality outside itself. They opine that, if a text makes reference outside itself, this reference is directed at another text. Extratextuality reality is described through existing texts. (ibid.:4). This is cleverly shown through the title of *Things Fall Apart*. Chinua Achebe takes the title of his text from a poem written by W. B. Yeats titled "The Second Coming". The concept of text is taken as verbal entity that comprises outside reality as well Aksoy (2001:195). In other words, the reality of human being and the interpretation of the outside world come into being through texts. History always manifests itself to us in the form of text and because of this

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fact, we are inclined to agree with Hayden White's literary approach to the study of history Hayden (1995:213).

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a historical prose narrative, arranged in a literary mode. Stories in the narrative are arranged in unity of thought and have been translated into French in an understanding manner by Michel Ligny. The text analyses the destruction of African culture by the appearance of the Whitemen in terms of destruction of the bonds between individuals and their society. The book tells the story of the Ibo in the Eastern part of Nigeria between1850-1900. The novel gives an account of the changes that have taken place in Iboland as a result of the encounter between Europeans and Africans during the colonial period. Achebe recast history, philosophy, culture, religion and political traditions of people. He introduces readers into the Ibo culture which is not familiar to the generality of the people even within Nigeria and to the rest of the world. The power of language in *Things Fall Apart* is very strong. Achebe knows the dangers of Africans not having their own stories and so he has created this story to remember a time and place that might otherwise be forgotten. He summarized this in a proverb: "Until lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter".

Textual Analysis of the Text

The translation of *Things Fall Apart* is source text conditioned. The language used by the author reflects the cultural and linguistic preferences of his environment. Consequently, the narration of stories cannot be separated from its textuality. Achebe culled the title of his text from a poem written by an Irish poet, W.B Yeats, titled "The Second Coming". Technically, this is only an excerpt.

The poem consists of more than four lines:

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world

The above underscores the concept of intertextuality proposed by Beaugrande and Dressler (1981). Unfortunately, the role of the translator is totally lost in this regard. Michel Ligny fails to transfer these lines in his French translation. The function of a text constrains linguistic and stylistic choices. When translating any literary text, some translators do it intuitively and hope, for the best; others favour a more systematic, analytical approach. It should be noted that literary translation involves a careful stylistic analysis of the source text because translation is not a transference merely of sense, but also of style, and in fact these often cannot be separated in a literary text. This is particularly true of poetic translation and discourse in the translation of *Things Fall Apart* into French. The

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translator's role is to correctly decode the intertextual relations of the source text, keeping in mind that the relevant intertextual relations should be rendered correctly and adequately in the target language and style.

The concept of Nord's (1991) "functionality plus loyalty" according to which the translator is committed to both the source text and the target text situation, responsible to the target-text audience and loyal to the source-text author, has not been achieved through the omission of the translation of the source text's poem. Thus, the coherence of the original text in the target text has not been preserved.

Translation of Charactonyms

The translation of charactonyms in *Things Fall Apart* by Michel Ligny is successful. Charactonyms are names that perform a characterizing function. Alexander K. (2008). Charactonyms are given names. They perform a descriptive function. One of the signs of a charactonym is its common stem. Let us consider some examples form the text:

a. Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His frame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen, he had brought honour to his village by throwing **Amalinze the Cat**. p.3.

Okonkwo était bien connu à travers les neuf villages et même au-delà. Sa réputation reposait sur de solides réussites personnelles. Jeune homme de dix-huit ans, il avait apporté honneur et gloire à son village et terrassant **Amalinze le Chat**. p.9.

b. In the end Okonkwo threw the **Cat.** p.3.

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A la fin, Okonkwo terrassa le **Chat**. p.9.

c. **Kotma** of the ash buttocks
He is fit to be a slave
The White man has no sense
He is fit to be a slave. p.123.

Kotma aux fesses de cendres,
Il est bon pour faire un esclave
L'homme blanc n'a pas de bon sens
Il est bon pour faire un esclave. p.211.

The relevance of the significant element must be suggested by means of motivator in the translation of charactonym. From the above, the motivator is part of the text expressed by the means of synonym, the Cat" rendered as "le Chat", giving the name its characterizing function. Contextually, Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten from Umuofia to Mbaino. He is given the name "the Cat" because his back would not touch the earth during wrestling. It must be noted that Okonkwo's culture is achievement oriented. Achebe makes the following remark about Okonkwo's society:

Age was respected among his people but achievement was revered. As the elders said, if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings. Okonkwo had clearly washed his hands and so he ate with kings and elders. ibid.: p.6

L'âge était respecté parmi les gens de son people mais la réussit était réverée comme disaient les anciens. Si un enfant se lavait les mais, il pouvait manger avec les rois. Okonkwo s'était indubitablement lave les mais et

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c'est pourquoi il mangeait avec
les rois et les anciens. ibid.: p.1

The translation of "kotma" as "kotma" in the French translation is a charactonym. The term "kotma" is not of Ibo origin; it is a word that is used to qualify the corruption of the "white court messengers". These court messengers were greatly hated in Umofia because they were foreigners and because of their arrogance and high-handedness. A charactonym may have different shades of meaning in the contexts within the text. The translation of charactonym has no absolutely permanent meaning in the text. It may express a continuum. But the motivator allows the translator to find the main characteristics dominating others. The meaning of the expressive name "kotma", though derogatory, is reinforced by the motivator "court messengers" who are the white colonialists. As part of the strategy used to translate charactonyms, the translator should note that dictionaries are not perfect authorities because they cannot keep up with all the changes that take place in the text, but provide standards that alert us to alternative variants and ambiguity.

From the above, the meaning reflects the characteristics expressed by the significant element from the source text. It also characterizes the court messengers by the same trait. Thus, the translator copes with the transformation of the name successfully in terms of colouring and characteristics. The equivalents which reflect the characteristics of their bearers can be realistically described as relevant equivalent.

In the translation of the above word into French, the translator takes into account stylistic colouring. The stylistic colouring of the significant element in the target text is close to the source text labelling. Charactonyms being the artistic creation of the source author is closely connected with the whole figurative system of a literary work. Michel Ligny's transfer of charactonyms of the target text is close to the source text; the translator performs a poetic function that is also of high value.

Translating Culture-Specific Terms

The task of Michel Ligny is to facilitate the transfer of a message and cultural elements from one language into another and creates an equivalent response from the receivers. The message of the source text is embedded in a cultural context and has to be transferred to the target language. Michel Ligny is aware of the use of Igboisms in the source text. In translating discourse that refers to a cultural period, he uses vocabulary that is relevant to the period in the target language. Let us consider the following:

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a. Eze elina, elina
Sala
Eze ulikwa ya
Ikwaba akwa oligholi
Ebe Danda nechi eze
Ebe uzuzu nete egwu
Sala.p.42.

Eze elina, elina
Sala
Eze ulikwa ya
Ikwaba akwa oligholi
Ebe Danda nechi eze
Ebe uzuzu nete egwu
Sala.p.76

b.Umuofia kwenu
Yaa!
Umuofia kwenu
Yaa!p.63.

Umuofia kwenu
Yaa!
Umuofia kwenu
Yaa!p.109

Achebe communicates the Ibo world-view and philosophy. The problem is how the translator would transfer this world-view into a different culture. Though, he does not belong to Achebe's socio-cultural world, he tries to solve this problem with the help of appropriate translation strategy. He uses the textual-contextual approach. He considers the effect of his translation to his target readers. This approach is more of an interpretation of how it means and what it does so as to bridge the cultural differences in the target language. His strategy also reveals that the target reader can understand the text even though they have no knowledge of the Ibo traditional society at all. Achebe's text is triumph of oral tradition in a written text as revealed in texts (a) and (b) above. The language is filled with word pictures.

The translator transcribes the above texts in the target language in other not to eliminate the oral discourse in the target text. It is not easy to transplant a text

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steeped in one culture into another. Particularly demanding from the translator's point of view is the use of culture specific words, that is, the use of Igboisms. In texts (a) and (b), the reality being represented is not familiar to the translator, thus, the translator, thus, the translation stumbles and becomes difficult to comprehend for French readers. In spite of the apparent difficulty in the translation of Igboisms in the text Michel Ligny's translation gives certain linguistic density to his translation in the target language and brings forth the richness of the text to the new readers. Footnotes can however be intrusive. Their use is absolutely absent in the translation. Michel Ligny's translation of the above words reflects their low social register and adds a foreignizing fidelity to the target text. Their translations do not need footnotes, since it is clear from the contextual surrounding of the source text.

In the above texts, the reality being represented is not familiar to the translator;thus, the translator stumbles and becomes difficult to comprehend for the target reader. Misunderstanding leads to war and wars lead to untold suffering of the people. The translation of texts (a) and (b) makes no sense to the target reader who is not familiar with the culture and nuances of the source text. This is because African culture as a whole is drawn upon the collective wisdom of the people thus, serving important social and ethical features. It is difficult to translate African language and culture without knowing the oratures on which African draws their styles and images. For instance, Achebe in his text tells the story of the mosquitoes, why these insects buzz irritatingly in people's ears. Also early in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe writes: "Among the Ibo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly and proverbs are the palm oil with words are eaten". Apart form the fact that this is a stylistic economy, it also serves to make a point and sticks in our memory. The translation of culture specific terms show that translation will always remain translation no matter the strategy adopted to translate it.

Translation of Songs

There are a lot of Ibo popular songs in *Things Fall Apart*. The translator adequately handles their translations into the target language. The above texts are songs that are orally transmitted from generation to generation, loosing subjective features from the translator to enrich its general cultural heritage in the target language. Let us consider a few of these songs:

The rain is falling, the sun is shining
Alone Nadi is cooking and eating. p. 25.

La pluie tombe, le soleil brille
Tout seul, Nnadi fait la cuisine et mange. p.48.

b. For whom is it well, for whom is it well?

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There is no one for whom it is well. p. 95.

Pour qui tout va bien, pour qui tout va bien?
Il n'y a personne pour qui tout aille bien! p.164.

The above songs are popular songs. The former is a song that children normally sing when rain is falling in tin, slanting showers through sunshine and quiet breeze. Children sing this song while they run about. The latter is sung when a woman dies in Iboland. Gorleé D. (2005:7) terms these songs as vocal translation to refer to translation of poetic discourse in the hybrid art of the musicopoetic forms, shapes and skills. Kaindl K. (2005:235) refers to these songs as means through which cultures are articulated and hence communicated to people of different linguistic, historical and cultural background. From the perspective of lyrical structure, song translation is under the same kinds of constraints as poetry translation.

Conclusion

Not only is translation of Nigerian literature one of the most intellectually difficult and challenging activities for translators, it is also one of the most insightful and stimulating experiences for the translators with the diversities of cultures and the fundamental problems of human existence. Moruwawon B.S (2006:179). The translator of Chinua Achebe's text faces a great challenge dealing with language and culture. Proper understanding enables the translator to discover the most effective methods for translating the text from different cultural background. It is evident that different cultural concepts, thinking patterns, beliefs and values may cause a vast range of difficulties and misunderstandings, which underlie the variety of language usages and forms. In other to achieve functional equivalent between the source language and target language text, the translator makes use of a good strategy for the translation of textual, contextual and culture specific items in the text. Chinua Achebe translates the Ibo society to non-Ibos. He plays a double role: the Ibo words show the alienness of culture, thus, making the Ibo culture undissolved to create a gap between the two cultures. Michel Ligny's translation retains the cadences and style of Chinua Achebe in his French translation.

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