



**THE DIFFICULTY IN TRANSLATING THE CULTURAL CONTENT OF A LITERARY WORK,
DONE IN THE SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE, INTO THE FIRST FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO
THE CULTURE OF THE NOVEL: THE CASE OF “DIFFICILE A SURVIVRE” BY TONY EZIKE**

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Abstract

Although translation is important in human communication, it is not an art very easily acquired? In translation, there are a lot to consider. In this work, we are taking a look at the translation of the cultural aspect of a literary work. We are studying Tony Ezike's novel (Difficile à Survivre). This is a novel written in French, the second foreign language to the culture, describing Igbo cultural realities. The first foreign language is English. The problem in this study is the fact that using the second foreign language to the culture of the people to express the same culture as found in the very language of the culture would possibly present cases of impossibility of translation or translations far away from the culture and therefore far away from the message. The problem becomes more complex when this is further retranslated into the first foreign language; which is English. We studied this novel and translated it into Igbo and English, to see the level of the accuracy of information. Finally, we discovered that a writer who describes his culture in a foreign language, be it the first or the second, is liable to falter in expressing the culture of the original language. Foot notes may help in such circumstances to add more light to the message especially as it concerns the cultural content.

Keywords: Cultural Content, Literary Work, Second Foreign Language, First Foreign Language.

INTRODUCTION

Talking about the importance of translation in human life is repeating the obvious. Nobody speaks all the languages of the world yet we need information from those languages to exist. Let us not forget the story of the Tower of Babel from where the need for translation and interpretation arose. So, it became impossible to understand one another, the different world views and other cultural differences. Understanding means understanding the others' world views and cultures, especially as it concerns literary translation.

There is actually no need repeating that translation is important in human relations; it is just like over flogging the obvious. There is evidence to see the story of the tower of Babel as the father event that gave birth to translation activities in human life. Since that time, there has not been a real understanding between peoples without involving translation. To communicate and understand each other means understanding the world views and cultures of others. This is mostly felt when it comes to the translation of literature related works. Without translation, people would not understand themselves.

Since the birth of translation, one has been searching for the most widely accepted definition of translation acceptable by all. The different theories propound different definitions according to their point of interest. The search for a common definition may not interest us for now.. Let us ask this question first of all: what do we look for in translation? And what could be the final objective of translation? Could there be some factors to consider before one could do a good translation? These are the questions we must answer to be able to present an adequate definition of translation. We should equally add the fact that the nature of the translation, the type of the text, must be considered too. In any case, a text is said to have been translated if it can contain all the realities of the original text. The possibility of achieving this is still a subject of debate for translators. What is sure is that the type of the text determines the how and final product of the translation. A times, the means to arrive at the same message with the original differs from one text to another; even within texts of the same type of translation. Concerning literary translation, the ways and technicalities followed to get a good translation of a poem would not be the same as the translation of a prose.

In this study, we are taking of the translation of a novel containing the igbo cultural realities expressing the igbo cultural realities using the second foreign language of the people, French language, as the means of expression. What could be the particularities and difficulties in the translation of this novel into the original language of the Igbo culture? Is it possible for the translator to picture himself as a co-writer given the initial difficulties of the writer in presenting certain Igbo cultural realities in French language? What nature of

difficulties would face a writer in expressing Igbo cultural realities in French, the second foreign language to the original culture? The problems of this study are of two angles; the difficulties in expressing Igbo cultural realities in French and the other difficulties in re-expressing the French version into English language.

To place ourselves in the proper position to do a proper study of this subject of study, in the area of literal translation, it would be necessary to have an idea of the relationship between culture and language. Culture is defined as the totality of knowledge acquired, instructions, knowledge, the totality of religious and social structures etc; intellectual and artistic manifestations etc that characterize a society (PETITE LAROUSSE EN COULEUR, (254). Baylon and Magnot present to us a simplified characteristics of language saying that the word language is basically in plural form and that when it is used in singular form, it shows a distinct means of communication among many others. According to Odoh «generally, language is seen as a means of communication made up of vocal signs and used for communication in a given society» (12). Baylon and Magnot, in a simplified manner, explain that the word « language » is fundamentally in plural, and when it is used in singular form, this singular form distinguishes a particular system of communication among others. Under the son, there are other thousands of languages (25). In a summary, language is just a major means of expressing and sharing one another's cultures. Therefore, language is the major means of sharing each others cultures. When we talk about language, we are implicitly talking about culture. The major question one should ask is; can a language foreign to a culture express perfectly a culture foreign to the language? Yes, because if not, there would be no possibility of sharing cultures; and no, because no language can completely describe another culture without getting implicitly involved; and this why it is possible to speak French in Igbo, given the nature of Igbo culture. Already we are foreseeing some difficulties faced by the author of the novel we are working on as it concerns the expression; or rather the translation of Igbo culture in French.

Our study is in the domain of literary translation. We have studied and translated in English the original written in French; a novel talking about life truly original of Igbo culture. There should be faithfulness in all translations. Now, what do we mean by being original in translation? Odoh is saying:

- The problem of fidelity in translation is a long time problem. It is still there, it will continue to be there but it is not of the same level in all the areas of translation. (27)

He is saying this because, in pragmatic translation where words maintain their denotative meanings, one can dream of fidelity. But the problem could be more complicated than what one could think. According to Danbaba:

- In the other hand, literary translation, looking at the two major areas concerned, namely, literature and translation, remains unequivocally the most mysterious area of translation. If an author himself becomes a stranger to his work as soon as he drops his pen, then all the efforts of the translator instantly becomes a subject of further studies... (81)

Dasuki remarks also that all the arguments on the authenticity (fidelity) in translation are raised based on the object and the nature of translation. This is why all the debates concerning the objective of translation remains important till date; and even some questions that have been on since then have not yet been trashed. Let us note that there are theories and theories of translation according the side from where the originators are seeing translation. Translation, however progresses despite the diversities of theories. This is why L-G Kelly remarks that "had translation depended for its survival on theories, it would have died long ago before Cicéro" (14). To demonstrate further the level of the complexity of literary translation, the result of a research by Odoh on the level of fidelity in drama translation reveals that:

- The characters may not exist in the target language. There is a great difficulty in translating linguistic ignorance. There is this difficulty in maintaining the level of language use. The difficulty in having equivalent terms to translate the actions of the characters is real. The problem of maintaining the reaction expected from the audience is clearly obvious (32)

Which theory do we then adhere to? These are the reasons that made us take a look at the Fidelity to the meaning theory of Albir (1990) (*La Notion de Fidélité en Traduction*). Here, the basic question is asked, 'what constitutes the message and what is the equivalence of the message? What is meaning? How do we get to the translation?

Maurice Pernier, in his book, *Les Fondements sociolinguistiques de la Traduction* insists that translating consists of replacing a message (or a part of the message) presented in a language, by an equivalent message presented in another language (26). He sees translation as a sociolinguistic activity which is determined by the nature of the target public of the translation. For, it is not all about the attachment to the source language or to the target language but an attachment to those the translation is meant for. (26). Albir continues the presentation of the problems of fidelity in these words of J.R. Ladmiral who said that every theory of translation is confronted by the old philosophical problem he described as 'du Même et de l'Autre '. According to him, seriously speaking, the translated text is not the same as the original but at the same time, not completely another' the same goes for fidelity; the concept of even fidelity to the original text brings to light this ambiguity

as per whether it is fidelity to the text or to the mind.

Here there is a basic question that should be asked; where does fidelity begin and where does it stop? Between written words and the spirit, is there any gap to be filled up? Are there other parameters to consider? This is the reason why one should go back in search of what truly constitutes translation. Albir is also asking the same question and this is why he concludes that the analysis of the translational reality is necessary to see what happens, at the level of the result of the translation, that is, the translated text, as well as the level of the procedure followed to arrive at such translation. For him, it is not all about the result alone; the process also helps to determine the fidelity in translation. This is the reason why he started his work on the interpretative concept of translation developed at ESIT.

For Lederer, her words summarize her position. Lederer is asking whether it is not then legitimate to reason that the process of communication as it is noticed within one and only language, is the same as that which ties the translator to his original text than, his translation to the reader, who will realize same, in such a way that the process of translation is realized more from the comprehension and expression process than the comparison of languages (10)

Albir starts his search into fidelity with the study of what constitutes comprehension. For him, words or sentences do not just simply translate to understanding. According to him, understanding a word or a sentence makes reference compulsorily to a large quantity of issues. Let us first of all, look at the consciousness of situational context, verbal context, cognitive context and the general socio-historical context (51). Therefore, by implication, understanding does not only depend on linguistic components (the written or spoken expressions). There are always extra-linguistic knowledge that mix up with the linguistic aspect and makes it easier to be fully understood. That is why, for him, there is always need, for two way knowledge to enable understanding: linguistic knowledge (Knowing the language) and more importantly a-linguistic knowledge (general knowledge, different specific knowledge on the subject, knowledge in the area of the situation). This knowledge is not a list of concepts, but forms a complex network of cognitive relations (52)

Concerning faithfulness to the meaning which translation is always after, Albir notes that the modifications that a translated text undergoes, gives birth to different variations.

He continues as he claims that there is a relationship with so many series of elements that differ in each case; that in each text, in the original and its/their translations, there is a linguistic difference, difference between the author and the translator, the difference in periods of writing, the difference in the cultural background and the difference in the target population.(52)

In conclusion, to express a message, we use the language and language is to express the true message. Odoh, equally, admits that comparison between two linguistic structures is not enough to express the heartfelt message of the original text. (63) An eclectic approach, be it in the process or at the end of the translation would be advisable in the consideration of the totality of everything surrounding the text to be translated. We conclude this part with the words of J.P Sartre (in Lederer, 1994) that meaning is not the totality of the words, it is the organic whole» (23).

Research Problem

As we have already noted, our text of study is 'Difficile à Survivre, written by Tony Ezike, a novel that describes Igbo cultural realities in the second foreign language of the culture of the people. In the first instance, that already, in itself, is posing some cultural difficulty. The language used is describing a culture which is strange to it. We foresee some difficulties in expressing some cultural aspects in the part of the writer in one hand and more difficulties on the part of an inexperienced translator in the area of the culture of the Igbo people who ventures into translating this French version into English.

Research Objective

Our objective in this work is therefore to study and translate the novel *Difficile à survivre* in Igbo and English languages to find out the difficulties at the cultural level which the author could encounter, in one part, then difficulties that an English translator could encounter in respect of igbo culture which carries the major messages in his English translation.

Research Questions

In order to arrive at valid results and conclusions, we should search for valid answers to the following questions.

- Was the translator able to respect all the Igbo cultural elements in his French version?
- Is it possible for the translator to encounter difficulties in translating the Igbo cultural aspects in his English translation of the French Version?

Importance of Research

We love learning foreign languages; which is good and advisable. We should also obligatorily master

our culture and our cultural language. Describing igbo culture in a foreign language, especially a culture very far away from igbo culture, poses problems because there could be some tendencies to destroy the original culture before the readers. The aim of this study is to reemphasize the value of cultures.

In the effort to respect the foreign language, and consequently the foreign culture, we forget we are describing our own very culture and not that of a foreign language. Translators thus become conscious of the fact that what matters in translation is the message and not the language. If language is over respected, it would affect the message especially in the case of literary translation. If it were possible to speak Igbo in French, it would have been better.

It is in this regard that Kuneme, a Zulu poet quoted by Balogun, revealed his observation by letting us know that he feels that Africa, in order to go back to his African literary tradition should first of all create his own literature; if the world and Europe cannot access this literature, worse for them(02)
Whoever talks of the literature of a people, talks about their language and their culture.

Limitation of Study

We should remark here that it is not all about linguistic analysis as such. We use language to drive our point home that we must always have cultural considerations in translation and also in the works of writers who express themselves in foreign languages as they describe their cultures. Without mincing words, our analyses here will be based on Igbo/French cultural difficulties and the further complexities of the French/English translation. Having introduced our study, we go to take a look at the methodology of our study.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology required in this study is not a complex methodology. We are taking a look at the socio-cultural considerations in translation of Tony Ezike's work 'Difficile à Survivre'. We shall present here a brief summary of the novel. The novel that started with a little flashback is talking about a hero of the Village named Ngokonte where his brother is reportedly collaborating with the Mopolos, the government army, in destroying the village and the villagers. Unfortunately, a confrontation between Ochike, the hero, and a member of the mopolos lead to the death of this member of the mopolos. Consequently, Ochike had no choice but to run away from his Village to live abroad. He died miraculously. His wicked brother was accused of having killed his brother Ochike and the problems he encountered with Ochike's widow forced him into exile where he was said to have died.

Here, it is all about literary translation. It means there is a relationship between language and culture in translation. This is why we started this study with a conscious in-depth study of the text in order to see clearly the manner the writer translated these areas of cultural concern in French. Furthermore we have also analyzed certain cases to see how an inexperienced translator could trap himself in an excessive attachment to the linguistic structure of the foreign language.

We have presented here the collected data with some explanations in support of the data collected. We have also given detailed explanations of some cultural situations that presented difficulties both to the writer as well as the inexperienced translator. Data were organized around each concerned research question. It is the result of these analyses that enabled us to arrive at certain conclusions.

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Here, we are purely concerned with all that is cultural in nature. We will try to see where the writer encountered difficulties in expressing the exact cultural message; and in this case we shall examine the appropriateness of the expression of the Igbo culture in French language and the difficulties that the translator of the French version into English would struggle with. A translator who does not know much about Igbo culture, would he be able to render appropriate aspects that require the perfect knowledge of Igbo culture? Let us not forget that according to Danbaba in Abudof, the link language-thought-culture is so complex that it is so difficult to separate one from the other (19). Let us also note here that we may not be able to present all the cases discovered. Some examples can help us.

Question 1

Was the writer able to respect the entire Igbo cultural cases in his French version?

Mon fils, continua-t-il, sois le bien venu! Tu vas rester ici pour toujours. Ton papa était mon père et ta mère, ma mère. (p16)

My son, he continued, you are welcome to our home! Here will be your home from now. Your father was my father and your mother, my mother.

O gwakwa m si Nwa m, nnnoo! Anyi na gi ga-ebizi bido ugbua. E jirim papa gi mere nna, ma jirikwa nne gi mere nne.

In French, « tu vas rester ici pour toujours » may not suggest anything negative but in Igbo culture, the person concerned is supposed to be pampered, given his situation. This takes us to choose the translation which

reflects Igbo culture in such a circumstance. In Igbo culture, it is not about a forced life. May be 'Mon fils, sois le bien venu chez toi, ici est ta famille à partir d'aujourd'hui' could have been a better option for this translation.

Les visites à la famille en deuil continuèrent pendant quatre jours, soit une semaine traditionnelle qui marque la fin de la première étape du deuil. Confrères et beaux-frères se dispersèrent, mais nos sœurs continuèrent à se présenter au foyer du défunt pendant deux semaines traditionnelles. (p33)

Visits to the bereaved family continued for four days, which was also a traditional one week that marked the end of the first stage of mourning. Friends and brothers-in-law dispersed, but the Umuada continued to come to the home of the deceased for two traditional weeks, let's say for nine days.

Ije mgbaru n'ezinuno mmadu nwunari digidere rue ubochi ano, yabu, ofu izu n'omenala anyi nke n'egosi njedebe usoro nke mbu nke akwmozu. Ndi ukwunibe na ndi ogo anasigo mana umuada gana-abikwa n'ulo onye mmadu nwunari ganye na ngwucha izu ibua n'omenala anyi, yadu ubochi itolu.

'Nos sœurs' presents a limited and partial meaning of what the author meant in this context. Normally, in Igbo culture, every female born in a village and married outside, comes home each time someone dies in the Village. They are called 'umuada'.

Nos sœurs' does not translate the cultural meaning of 'umuada'. Umuada is translated by 'les enfants-filles bien aimées du village'. These constitute a strong group that play very important role in controlling life in the village and disciplining especially the stubborn ones. We suggest that the term 'UMUADA' be retained and explained at the foot notes.

D'ailleurs, tout le monde savait à Adeewaa que la haine d'un frère ne s'implante pas profondément dans le cœur. (p 50)

However, everybody knew at Adeewa that the hatred of a brother is not deeply rooted in the heart.

Etu O sina di, onye obula mara n'Adeewa, n'iwe nwanne adighi eru n'okpukpu.

Let us once more note that the author forgot that it is true that hatred of brothers is not deeply rooted in the heart, but in Igbo culture, people say 'does not get to the bones' Adeewaa savait que la haine d'un frère ne s'implante pas dans les os. Il y a une modulation, une partie pour une autre.

Les yeux apprécient d'abord un excellent plat avant que la langue ne le déguste (p 71)

The eyes appreciate a good food before it is tasted by the tongue.

Anyanwa-erigodu tupu onu erie.

The author expressed the desired message but forgot the culture. In Igbo culture, it is the mouth and not the tongue. This is why we proposed the translation below «Les yeux apprécient d'abord un excellent plat avant que la bouche ne le déguste.»

Question 2

Can an apprentice translator have difficulties in the translation of the cultural contents in the English translation of the French version?

Une lumière feinte émanait d'un uriona pour tout éclairage. Je voyais mal le visage d'Odohm Ochike. (p 14)

The only light in the whole place was a faint light coming from an uriona. I could hardly see the face of Odohm Ochike.

Nani oku uriona nke adighi achasi ike bu oku e nwere e ji afu uzo n'ebe ahu. Ifu iru Odohm ochike siiri m ike.

Here the author correctly made use of 'Emprunt', what is called 'borrowing' in English. This gave him the opportunity to express clearly the message with the cultural content. He could have equally said, 'une lampe à l'huile traditionnelle' but decided to bring every aspect of the message including the cultural which is the real message.

La rumeur qu'Odohm ochike refusa le manger traversa sept terres, sept brousses et sept rivières par mont et par vau et parvint à tous nos relations, hommes et femmes, aventuriers et chasseurs nocturnes, qui ne s'attardèrent pas à accourir (p25)

The news that Odohm Ochike has refused food went across seven lands, seven forests and seven rivers up and down stream, and has gotten to all our relations, men and women, trespassers and night hunters who wasted no time in rushing down.

Akuko gbasara iju nni nke Odohm Ochike juru gabigara oma agu asa, ahiha asa ya na mmiri asa, na mgbago ma na mgbada wee ruta umu nne anyi nile nti, ma nwoke ma nwanyi, ma ndi ije ma ndi ogba nta abali bu ndi egbugho oge n'iji oso wee bia.

In Igbo culture, people usually say that someone has refused food to express the death of some one. The author did this perfectly well.

The inexperienced translator would quickly rush to interpretation; 'the man died'; which will give the message without the cultural content that completes the message. This means that the message would not be complete.

Si, par mal chance, une bonne mort ne reçoit pas les droits des rites funéraires, son esprit ne trouve pas de repos et continue à déranger les maisons des proches parents qui, à leur tour, ne se repose non plus jusqu'à ce

qu'ils fassent des réparations nécessaires. Par contre, si on accorde à une personne qui fit une mauvaise mort des rites qui ne lui sont pas dus, les proches parents ne peuvent éviter de graves conséquences que s'ils exhument son corps et tranche sa tête qu'ils déposent dans une mauvaise forêt. (p29)

If, unfortunately, a good death was not accorded his funeral rites, his spirit remains restless and continues to disturb the houses of his close relatives who, in turn, could not rest too until they did the necessary reparations. In the other hand, if a person who died a bad death was accorded rites he did not merit, the close relatives must surely receive the serious consequences except they exhumed the body and cut the head which they carried to the evil forest,

Onwezia k'ife si wee tugharia nke na ezigbo onwu enwetaghwo ugwu nile e tosiri ikwanyere onye nwuru anwu, mkpulu obi ya ama zue ike ma bulukwa nnukwu nsogbu nyere umu nne ya nile, ndi, n'aka nke ha, ama zunata ike ganye na ha emezuo ihe nile dika o kwesiri. N'aka nke ozo, o bulu na a kwanyere onye nwuru ajo onwu ugwu n'etosigho, o ga ebutere umu nne ya nsogbu mimri emi ganye na ha aga boputa ozu ya ma gbuputa isi ya nke ha ga atunye n'ime ajo ohia.

Here, the dichotomy that separates the death of a good man and the death of a bad person is seen in the terms used to express the two opposing truths; une bonne mort and une mauvaise mort which are just the best way to bring out the cultural content of the message.

La bonne mort est plusieurs fois meilleure qu'une mauvaise vie ;(p30)

A good death is several times better than a bad life.

Ezigbo onwu ka mm augbolo ugbolo karia ajo ndu.

This is the same as the example seen above..

RESUME ET CONCLUSION

In this study, we concerned ourselves with the Igbo socio-cultural issues in translation in Tony Ezike's novel 'Difficile à Survivre. We always see translation as effort to render the message of the original faithfully from one language to the other. Language is not the objective of translation but the message. We discovered in our study that there could be difficulties in expressing Igbo cultural messages in French language. As well as translation into English a text written in French describing igbo culture. The question we asked was, grosso modo, whether a strict adherence to the structure of the target language could give us a faithful translation? We concluded that the knowledge and respect of the culture of the source language is primordial in translation, especially with regard to literary translation.

We therefore conclude that:

- That the non mastery of Igbo language by igbo writers of French language poses a lot of difficulties to the Igbo writers writing in French.
- A strict attachment to the target language may not permit the transfer of the entire message required.
- The knowledge of the cultures of the concerned languages is also very important especially in literary translation.
- Translators who are not well rooted in the source language may likely have difficulties in translating.
- No translation theory has all the solutions to all the problems of all the forms of translation.
- Literary translation is quite different from all other types of translation.

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