

The Interface between Translation and Drama: Translating Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* from English into French

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Abstract

*Translating a dramatic text is a daunting task. The challenge is rooted in the fact that the text is specifically written to be acted or performed on the stage. A dramatic text is written in acts, scenes, and contains dialogues spoken by the characters. Apart from this, translating a dramatic text from one language with a different cultural setting into another language requires high creativity to guarantee faithfulness in the target language and culture. This article analyzes the interface between translation and drama as well as the woes and possibilities of translating Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* into French. The result of this research indicates that linguistic and cultural issues which are based on the shared knowledge of the original author and the readers are mostly problematic in translation and usually require the translator to do serious research to acquire the necessary background knowledge, and find out whether this background knowledge is at the target language readers' disposal; if not, to make it available to them through translations, expansions, explanations, and footnotes.*

Keywords: translation, theatrical translation, French, Wole Soyinka

Translation has been defined by many theorists in various ways and we will take a look at a few definitions just to have the knowledge of what translation means or what it entails. According to Crystal as cited by Shastri, "translation is a natural term used for all tasks where the meaning of the expressions in one language is turned into another whether the medium is spoken, written or signed" (3). Nida Eugene and Taber opine that "translation consists of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style"(16). For them, translation involves giving the equivalent of the message of the source language in the target language. Catford was also of the same opinion when he defined translation as "the replacement of textual material in one language (source language) by the equivalent textual material in another language (target language)" (20). The main task of translation is finding the equivalent of the source language in the target language. This opinion was also corroborated by Bell as cited by Moruwawon when he considered translation as "a representation of a text in one language by a representation of an equivalent text in a second language" (181). However, Vinay and Darbelnet simply defined translation as "le passage d'une langue A à une langue B pour exprimer une même réalité" [The passage of language A into language B to express the same reality] (20). Translation involves replacement, substituting, reproducing, and transferring a message of a particular language into another language. Translation requires two languages, the source language (original language) and the target language.

This paper takes a close look at the translation of Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* into French by J. Chuto and Phillipe Laburthe-Tolra. Literary translation can be extremely tasking and is faced with several challenges. Translating dramatic texts generally has its share of challenges because languages are not all the same and when it comes to different types of translation, they also come with their own challenges due to the peculiarities of dramatic texts. Literary works like prose, poetry, and drama have their own peculiarities and characteristics that a translator has to consider before he can accurately translate these text-types. For our study, we are treating a dramatic text which is quite different from prose or poetry. This study seeks to analyze the challenges encountered by the translators, Chuto and Laburthe-Tolra, of Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* into French. Before the analysis, we will take a look at what the translation of a dramatic text entails and all that should be taken into consideration while translating such a text.

Translating a Dramatic Text

A drama text is written to be played, and every play is performed to correct the wrongs in society. Although some people believe that not all dramas are acted out, that some are just written to be read, this buttresses the point made by Butake as cited by Yong when he said "the ultimate aim of writing a play is usually to see it performed even though it is not always that a play script which is even published find its way on stage for a number of reasons" (43). However, Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* was actually first performed before it was published as a text. The text of drama is quite unique from prose or poetry. The characteristic feature of a drama text distinguishes it from other literary works. A drama is written in acts and scenes, and contains dialogues spoken by the characters. The stage directions included in a drama makes it performable, and this cannot be found in a prose work. A drama can also contain songs and mimes. And like every literary text, it is also imbedded in the culture of the author, that is to say some cultural elements are also included.

Zuber-Skerritt says that translating drama is the rendering of "one language and culture into another and the transposition of the original translated or adapted text onto the stage" (485). This reveals that translating a dramatic text is not just about translating it from one language into another language, it also involves the adaptation of a text for the stage. A dramatic text is seen as incomplete when it is not yet staged, and Bassnett corroborates this idea when she says, "... a theatre text is read differently. It is read as something *incomplete*, rather than a fully rounded unit, since it is only in performance that the full potential of the text is realized" (123). While translating a dramatic text from one language into another, the adaptability of that text on the stage should also be kept in mind. The adaptation of a dramatic text on the stage poses a challenge to the translator of such texts. The translator has to take into consideration the culture of the target audience and be involved in a form of rewriting in order to suit his target audience.

The complexity involved in translating a dramatic text cannot be overemphasized in the sense that a dramatic text is quite different from a prose text, and each of these has its own peculiarities which has to be taken into consideration while translating. A dramatic text contains some elements of orality. Bassnett affirmed that "since the play text is written for voices, the literary text contains also a set of *paralinguistic* systems, where pitch, intonation,

speed of delivery, accent, etc., are all signifiers” (134). A dramatic text has some distinctive features that make it peculiar, and a translator must have an adequate knowledge of these characteristics before he can faithfully translate a text from one language to another. A translator must recognize the fact that a dramatic text is written in dialogues and should be translated in like manner. He should also have knowledge of the structure of a dramatic text. The stage directions in a dramatic text should also be taken into account while translating, because mistranslating them will mislead the stage director of the play. Every gesture counts while translating a dramatic text because a gesture could have an implication; if it is not rightly rendered in translation, the actors would not be able to stage it appropriately. Punctuations should be accurately rendered while translating a dramatic text as well so that actors do not misread dialogues, for instance, giving emphasis where there is none. The setting, the costumes, and the characters are also features to be considered while translating. The final element of a play is the audience, and thus, the translator must take into consideration the culture of his target audience, and avoid offending them. This means he must have a deep knowledge of the culture of his target audience. He should be able to produce the same effect on his target audience as on the original. Zuber-Skerritt underlines this privilege position of the audience in a translated dramatic text when he states, “the translation of drama as a performing art is mainly dependent on the final production of the play on the stage and on the effectiveness of the play on the audience” (485).

As earlier stated, dramatic text contains some features which can pose a challenge to the translator, and Soyinka’s work is no exception. Songs, cultural elements, proverbs, and dances are part of Soyinka’s dramatic text. A translator should have clear understanding of these features before he can render them appropriately in the target language.

A Cursory Note on *The Lion and The Jewel*

The Lion and the Jewel was first performed at the Ibadan Arts Theatre in 1959, and the book was published in 1963 by Oxford University Press. The play is the first of many written by Wole Soyinka, a renowned Nigerian playwright. The play is a comedy of manners set in the small remote village of Ilujinle and centers around three main characters: Lakunle, Sidi, and Baroka. Lakunle, a village teacher who sees the tradition of the society as barbaric, is wooing Sidi, the village belle, who is the jewel referred to in the title. Lakunle wants to marry Sidi, but he is against the tradition of paying a bride price. At the time, Sidi is still a virgin and seen as the beauty of her village. She also becomes prominent when her pictures are published as the centerfold of a magazine by a foreign photographer. Baroka, the Bale of Ilujinle on the other end, a polygamist who wants a new wife added to his harem of wives, finds Sidi the best candidate and makes it known to his first wife, Sadiku, who takes it on herself to inform Sidi about the Bale’s interest. Sidi is not interested because he is too old for her but later, she falls for his pranks when he informs Sadiku that he has become impotent, which news also reaches Sidi. In a bid to taunt him, she goes to Baroka, but is defeated by the lion, losing her virginity in the process. Lakunle is angry, but he still proposes marriage to Sidi since he knows she is no longer a virgin and so he can avoid paying the bride price. Sidi, however, finally marries Baroka to cover her shame.

The play is presented as a metaphor of present-day Africa that is torn between the old traditions and the modern way of life brought by the white men. Soyinka's theater technique is outstanding and efficient. His words are simple and very demonstrative. Since Soyinka is a typical Yoruba man, words in Yoruba language are found in this dramatic text, so the translator must understand Yoruba language and culture to a large extent. Asobele-Timothy pointed this out when he said "a serious minded translator of Soyinka's works needs to be initiated into the Yoruba language and more importantly into its rich cultural myths as well as its magico-religious inclinations" (15). The text is however very African in the sense that it is filled with elements like manners and customs, rites, marks of respect, songs, trees, animals, polygamy among others.

The Challenges in Translating *The Lion and the Jewel* into French

As earlier stated, Chuto and Laburthe-Tolra (hitherto referred to as "the translators") faced a number of problems during the translation of *The Lion and the Jewel*, ranging from linguistic to cultural challenges. For our analysis, we will be giving some extracts from both the source and the target text to clarify our points, and to avoid repetition, we will make use of these abbreviations to represent the two texts: **LTJ** for *The Lion and the Jewel* (English text) and **LLP** for *Le lion et la perle* (French version).

Linguistic Issues: Like other literary genres, a drama text contains linguistic terms that are pertinent to the style of the author which could be difficult to translate. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, Soyinka makes abundant use of Yoruba words in the text and the translators render them without translation:

LTJ: A clearing on the edge of the market, dominated by an immense 'odan' tree (1).

LLP: Une clairière en bordure d'un marché, dominée par un immense spécimen de l'arbre 'odan' (7).

From the above text, a Yoruba name given to the tree is retained in the French version. A drama text that is to be performed should be clear enough for the stage director. An equivalent of that tree in French should have been used. A director, who does not understand what an "odan" tree is or what it looks like, would only be confused in giving the right stage directions.

LTJ: Yokolu Yokolu. Ko ha tan bi, Iyawogb'oko san' le, okoyo'ke ... (44)

LLP: Yokolou, yokolou. Ko ha tan bi, Iyawogb'oko san' le, okoyo'ke ... (57)

Here, the song by Sidi is rendered word for word in the translated version though it is in Yoruba in the original version, only the first two words were transliterated to suit the French language. But the actors who would be performing a play like this will not understand what this song means, and they will not be able to pronounce these words very well since they are not Yoruba. The aim of a drama text is for it to be performed to the public, but when the actors are struggling with the words, how best will the audience receive the message?

We have instances where parts of the original text were rendered the same way in the translated version. A translation of a drama text should be able to adapt the words and places in order to suit the target audience. Those places or cities left unadapted would only pose a

challenge to the audience, the translator should have replaced them with the equivalent cities in the target language.

LTJ: ... in Lagos, that city of magic, in Badagry where Saro women bathe in gold. (5)

LLP: ... à Lagos, cette cité magique, à Badagry, où les femmes Sao se baignent dans l'or. (12)

Another instance where an equivalent could have been rendered in the target language is this:

LTJ: ... even in smaller towns less than twelve miles from here ... (5)

LLP: ... et même au sein de plus petites villes, à moins de douze miles d'ici ... (12)

Here, "miles" was translated as "miles" in French, whereas to have an equivalent effect in the target text, "kilomètre" could have been used as the measuring scale.

There is an instance of mistranslation by the translators in the text, which can result in misunderstanding by the target audience. Where the author had mentioned "the dead in the village," the translation reads "the village of the dead," which alters the meaning completely:

LTJ: But you, you and the dead of this village trample it with feet of ignorance. (6)

LLP: Mais toi, toi, ainsi que ce village de mort, tu le piétines avec les pieds de l'ignorance. (13)

The translators, however, do exhibit their literary prowess despite the challenges faced in translating Soyinka's works. They resorted to figurative expressions in order to pass their message across to the target audience, and they made use of these expressions in order to make their audience have an equivalent reaction to what was felt by the original audience. Here are a few of such instances:

LTJ: That is part of what I say. (4)

LLP: Tu apportes de l'eau à mon Moulin. (11)

The French expression literally means "you are adding weight to my argument." This was spoken when Lakunle and Sidi were arguing over the issue of women being the "weaker sex." The translators did justice to the translation of that sentence by choosing to express the idea figuratively.

LTJ: For now, it is this village I shall turn inside out. (5)

LLP: Pour l'instant, c'est ce village que je veux retourner comme une chaussette. (11)

Here, the translators use metaphors to make the statement more explicit to their audience, whereas the use of metaphor is absent in the original statement made by Lakunle.

The translators here reveal their aesthetic prowess by finding an equivalence for the rhyme in the target language. Rhymes could pose a challenge to literary translators, but they were able to overcome this challenge by finding an equivalent expression in the target language. Below is the extract to illustrate this point:

LTJ: and you must chirrup like a cockatoo. (6)

LLP: tu te mets à caqueter comme un cacatoès. (13)

Generally, linguistic issues tend to be a part of the challenges faced by translators. Languages differ, even when they are from the same origin, and it takes a deep knowledge of the two languages involved before one can accurately render a meaningful translation from one language to the other. Also, when the source text uses two languages, it can be more taxing, which is the case with Soyinka's play. It is hybrid in nature, written in English with Yoruba words scattered throughout. This is one of the challenges faced by the translators, and oftentimes in the text, they had to recourse to footnotes to explain what was meant after rendering the translation word for word in the French version. However, in some cases, the Yoruba words are left untranslated, and without meanings or explanations provided in footnotes. Here are a few instances from the text:

LTJ: Food sellers enter with cooking-pots and foodstuffs set up their '**adogan**' or stone hearth and build a fire. (55)

LLP: Des gargotiers entrent avec des marmites et des aliments, installent leur **adogan** (ou pierre de foyer), et allument un feu. (68)

The Translation of Yoruba Songs: Translation of songs in plays is seldom simple. When one deals with a text that will be set to music and sung, the translator has to take the liberty of making the song sound natural and appealing in the target language. Soyinka's translators, however, encounter woes in translating the song below into French due to existing linguistic patterns. Just as in translation, something is lost in the transfer of the song below, the result falls short of "faithfulness" to the target readers. The spirit of the original chant is lost in the target language.

LTJ: Mo te' ni. Mo te' ni.
 Mo te' ni. Mo te' ni
 Sun mo mi, we mo mi
 Sun mo mi, fa mo mi
 Yarabi lo m'eyi t'o le d'omo ... (64)

And also:

Tolani Tolani
 T'emi ni T'emi ni Sun mo mi, we mo mi
 Sun mo mi, fa mo mi
 Yarabi lo m'eyi t'o le d'omo. (64)

These songs were borrowed into the target text with explanations in the footnotes. But dealing with a theater text with a different audience, it is expedient that the words to be uttered by the actors are pronounceable, otherwise they would not be able to communicate with their audience. But having a French actor/actress sing Yoruba songs would only amount to nothing but misinterpretation.

The Translation of Yoruba Proverbs: Every language has a link to the culture of the people that speaks it. For a literary text, it is always embedded in the culture of the author. Wole Soyinka being a typical Yoruba man, although he writes in English, imbeds his work with Yoruba cultural elements. In the words of Asobele-Timothy, "Wole Soyinka's plays offer numerous examples of

automatic translation of the linguistic habits of the Yorubas” (7). This reveals that Soyinka often translated some Yoruba sayings directly into English in his works, seen in many instances in *The Lion and the Jewel*. Therefore, a translator faced with this type of literary text will be challenged with the Yoruba expressions which have been literally translated by the author into the English language. The translator does have recourse to word for word translation, which might not be the equivalent in the target language/culture. The translation of Yoruba proverbs is part of the auto-translation approaches of Wole Soyinka. Below is an example of a proverb that was transposed from Yoruba into English in the text and the translators had to translate it directly:

LTJ: The monkey sweats, it is only the hair upon his back which still deceives the world ... (54)

LLP: Le singe sue et seul le pelage sur son dos fait illusion au monde ... (67)

The Yoruba expression is “obo nlagun, irun eyin re niko je kayemo,” but the standard signifies “It takes time for good deeds to be recognized.” Sometimes, Soyinka’s use of this direct Yoruba to English translation of expressions is determined by the level of education of the speaker involved. The expression above was said by Baroka in the text. There are other examples of proverbial expressions in the text, and the translators were able to render the equivalence in the target language. For instance:

LTJ: Charity, they say, begins at home. (5)

LLP: Mais charité bien ordonnée, dit-on, commence par soi-même. (11)

The translation of this proverb by the translators reveals the linguistic and cultural knowledge of Yoruba language by the translators. They must have researched well into the language and culture before embarking on the work. Here is another example of an idiomatic expression found in the text:

LTJ: If the snail finds splinters in his shell, he changes house. Why do you stay? (6)

LLP: Si l’escargot trouve des échardes dans sa coquille, il déménage. Pourquoi t’incruster? (13)

Another culture related issue that can be challenging in the literary text generally is allusion or reference. Allusions are often the real untranslatables in translation work. Lefevere opined that allusions “usually involve some kind of cultural ‘shorthand,’ and with a word or phrase, which can evoke a situation that is symbolic for an emotion or state of affairs” (qtd. in MacLaren 43). Translators find allusions challenging because they are linked with culture. Soyinka’s works often reflect his religious inclinations, like Christianity, and the traditional religious background. Oftentimes, his characters make reference to biblical sayings and Yoruba traditional gods. Here is an example of a biblical reference made by Lakunle in the text:

LTJ: A prophet has honour except in his own home. (5)

LLP: Nul n’est prophète en son pays. (12)

This allusion is not rendered well in the translated version. The biblical allusion is found in Luke 4:24 when Jesus was speaking to his people. The French King James version gave this statement as “aucun prophète n’est bien reçu dans sa patrie.” This could have been used instead of the translation given by the translators. Another biblical reference made by Baroka is stated below:

LTJ: Yesterday's wine alone is strong and blooded, child, and though the Christians' Holy book denies. The truth of this, old wine thrives best within a new bottle. (54)

LLP: Seul le vin d'hier est fort et généreux, mon enfant, et malgré le livre saint des chrétiens qui dit le contraire, le vieux vin s'améliore davantage dans une bouteille neuve. (67)

Soyinka also makes reference to the small gods in the traditional Yoruba setting, and these gods are just rendered literally into the French language without explanation, the only adjustment in the translated version is that they were transliterated according to the French graphology.

LTJ: **Ogun** has said the word. (50)

LLP: **Ogoun** l'a décrété. (63)

LTJ: Below the humming birds which smoke the face of **Sango** ... (52)

LLP: au-dessous des oiseaux mouches voltigeant autour de la face de **Shango** ... (65)

Here, the translators could have given the equivalence of these small gods' names or better still given an explanation at the footnote of what they signify.

Transliteration is also used for some of the characters' names in order to suit the target language. "Sadiku" is rendered as "Sadikou" while "Lakunle" is rendered in the French version as "Lakounle." Names could also pose a challenge in the translation of Soyinka's text especially *The Lion and the Jewel* that is destined to be performed by different actors in the target language. This portrays the mind of MaClaren as she cited in her work that "the possible difficulty of pronunciation of foreign names should be taken into account for the performance text" (28). In translating Soyinka's play, the translators do take this into consideration by choosing the adaptation approach and adjusting the names to the target culture's rules of spelling and pronunciation.

Conclusion

Translating theatrical works from one language into another has problems which could be different from other kinds of translations. In translating *The Lion and the Jewel* into French, some challenges were encountered by the translators ranging from linguistic to cultural problems. The peculiarity of the author's text also poses some challenges to the translators. This article reveals some of the linguistic and cultural issues that were encountered, and how some of these issues were dealt with by the translators. From the study, it is revealed that the translators did a good job to a very large extent. In all, dramatic translators should always take into consideration the distinctive features of theatre texts, its performability while translating, and also the culture of the target audience.

The result of this research indicates that linguistic and cultural issues which are based on the shared knowledge of the original author and the readers are mostly problematic in the translation and usually demand that the translator do serious research to acquire the necessary background knowledge, and understand whether this background knowledge is at the target language readers' disposal. If not, it is their job to make it available to them through translations, expansions, explanations, and footnotes.

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