EVALUATION OF THE TRANSLATION OF NUIT DE SINE OF LEOPOLD SEDAR SENGHOR INTO ENGLISH

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Abstract

Evaluation which is usually defined as the act of judging the quality of something has, over the years, been used in different fields of human endeavour to appraise the performance of people and ensure the sustenance of quality of products and services. This study, therefore, seeks to examine evaluation of translations and to critically review the translation of Nuit de sine of Leopold Sedar Senghor into English. After reviewing the existing literature, it was discovered that the two main evaluative practices were reviewing and criticism. We also thoroughly analyzed Leopold Sedar Senghor's Nuit de Sine and made some inputs aimed at improving the English translation of the poem. We therefore recommend that there should be a periodic review of translations especially literary translations so as to enhance professional efficiency and probably bridge the gap between theory and practice in the profession.

Introduction

Translation is a professional activity that makes it possible for a text written in one language to be made accessible in another targeted language. This makes this human activity a very critical and indispensable one in a world with multiplicity of languages. Communication among the different linguistic communities of the world would have been very difficult without translation. Experts, at different fora, have highlighted the importance of this field of human activity. Efika and Okeogu (2000: 325) refer to it as

"a significant instrument for the spreading of all forms of culture: linguistic, political, economic, religious etc". The relevance of translation in enhancing mutual cooperation among the different peoples of the world and fast tracking national development has equally been stressed (Efika. and Okeogu, 2000:324, Ojeaga, 2000:345, Okeke, 2013:76, Anyabuike, 2015:13).

The fact that translation plays a key role in enhancing human communication and the development of nations implies that negligence on the part of any translator could in no small way hamper the realization of the laudable objectives of any given translation exercise. This brings to the fore the need to adopt strategies to sustain the quality of translation practice across the globe. Periodic evaluation of translations can be a sustainable means of measuring the level of performance in any translation endeavour as it is in other domains as well as an effective strategy for ensuring the sustenance of quality in the profession. In almost all fields of human endeavour, evaluation has been a very effective strategy for assessing and sustaining quality. In view of the fact that there is so much to talk and write about in translation studies, practitioners in this field scarcely discuss this highly essential instrument of quality assurance. Some of those who do usually place undue emphasis on the translated work instead of placing the source text and the target text side by side with a view to objectively assessing the adequacy or otherwise of the translation. Toury (1978 cited by Carol Maier) said that "comparisons between translations and originals often lead to an enumeration of errors and a reverence for the original." It is perhaps this feeling which is shared by a good number of practitioners in the field of translation that has contributed to the lack of interest demonstrated by most translators in matters relating to the subject of evaluation of translation. This obviously has led to "paucity in research endeavours addressing translation evaluation" (Abdullah Al-Melhi 2014:12).

The fact however remains that if high level of performance is to be sustained in the translation industry; the issue of evaluation has to be seriously addressed. It is in realization of this that we have undertaken, in this study, to examine the "Evaluation of Translations and the Translation of Nuit de Sine of Leopold Sedar Senghor into English". In the course of this work, we shall examine the concepts of translation and evaluation, we shall also take a look at the theoretical approaches to translation quality assessment with a view to establishing the theoretical background of the present study. After this, we shall review the French and English versions of "Nuit de Sine" of Leopold Sedar Senghor. Finally, there will be general commentary and conclusion.

The Concept of Translation: Experts generally agree that translation as a concept has to do with the process by which information expressed in one language is re-expressed in another language for the benefit of the users of the second language. The Chambers 21st Century Dictionary (Revised Edition) defines translation as "a word, speech, written text that has been put into one language from another" The same dictionary also adds that it is "an act or instance or the process of translating" The above definitions only highlight the dual nature of the concept of translation. That is, translation as a product which the first definition represents and translation as a process which the second definition highlights. The word, speech or written text referred to in the first definition is the product that results from the translation process carried out by the translator. Another definition that is of interest to us is the one given by the specialist Dictionary of Translation Studies as quoted by Hatim and Monday (2004:3) which defines the concept as:

> An incredibly broad notion which can be understood in many different ways. For example, one may talk of translation as a process or a product, and identify such sub-types as literary translation, technical translation, subtitling and machine translation, moreover, while more typically it

> just refers to the transfer of written texts, the term sometimes also includes interpreting.

The above definition did not only further highlight the dual nature of the concept of translation as a process or a product but it also clearly identifies the different aspects or sub-types of translation. While a discussion of these different types of translation is beyond the scope of the present work, it may be pertinent to state that the poem we have undertaken to discuss in this study is an aspect of literary translation. Having examined the concept of translation, we will now take a look at the concept of evaluation which is also key in this research work.

The Concept of Evaluation: Practitioners in the translation industry have not really concerned themselves with the issue of evaluation of translations. Those who did only presented their views in "translators' prefaces and annotations, complimentary poems and essays about the work of other translators, scholarly writing about translation theory and practice, and appraisals embedded in fictional commentary" (Maier 2001:206). This perhaps explains why this same author talked about "the unwritten history of translation reviewing and criticism", in his article on "Reviewing and criticism" published in Routledge Encyclopedia of Translations Studies in 2001.

Evaluation, however, is a noun from the verb "evaluate" which Chambers 21st Century Dictionary (Revised Edition) defined as "to form an idea or judgment about the worth of something" one can therefore say that evaluation of translation has to do with the act of making value judgments about a given translation. This value judgment should, however, entail highlighting the good qualities of such work as well as any errors found in it. Okeke (2000:361) referred to this exercise as "appreciation of translation". Okeke also quoted Simpson (1979) as having observed that:

> La critique doit faire un relevé des aspects négatifs et positifs de la traduction. Une telle démarche sera suivie par

> l'explication des aspects jugés négatifs telle que les écarts (additions, omissions, fautes de styles, interferences etc… (Translation criticism should highlight the negative and positive aspects of the translation in question. This will be followed by the explanation of the perceived negative aspects such as (addition, omission, stylistic errors and interferences) (our translation).

Translation criticism is therefore one aspect of evaluation of translation as Maier (2001:205) highlighted in the following words "Reviewing and criticism are evaluative practices that provide distinct but inseparable responses to published literary translations" Citing Oates (1990) and Woolf (1939), he goes further to highlight the differences that exist between the two forms of evaluation as follows:

> The differences cited conventionally between the two forms of evaluation hold true for translation as well: the reviewer alerts a reader to new books, describing them and passing judgment as to whether they are worth reading and buying; the critic addresses books that may or may not be new, considering them in detail and usually assuming a reader's familiarity with them.

From the foregoing, we can safely say that reviewing and criticism are two forms of evaluation in translation. With regard to the former, the reviewer usually analyses a new translation to assess the value and alert the potential readers on the existence of such work while in the case of translation criticism, the critic, could deal with both, old and new translations. In the exercise of his function, however, the critic thoroughly analyses the translation in question with a view to highlighting both the positive and negative aspects as Simpson indicated. The negative aspects should be properly explained and solutions proffered. It may be necessary, at this point, to state that the present work belongs to the second form of translation evaluation, that is, translation criticism. Having examined the concept of evaluation in translation, we will proceed by considering some of the theories that highlight issues in translation quality assessment so as to establish the theoretical basis of this work.

Approaches to Translation Quality Assessment:

The divergent views expressed in relation to translation practice have led to a situation where experts equally advance different opinions with regard to the issue of quality assessment in translation. House (2001:197) explained that approaches to translation quality assessment include" "anecdotal and subjective, response – oriented approaches and text-based approaches."

In anecdotal and subjective approaches, emphasis is placed on "faithfulness to the original or the natural flow of the translated text" (House, 2001:197). She equally explained that "proponents of this approach tend to see the quality of a translation as dependent on the translator and his/her personal knowledge, intuitions and artistic competence". Those who belong to this school of thought, therefore, argue that a good translation must be faithful to the original and the language of the translated text must flow naturally so as not to create the impression that it is a translation. They also argue that for a translator to successfully achieve a very good quality translation, he must be highly knowledgeable especially in the area in question. The translator must equally be very intuitive and skilful in the act of translating.

With regard to the response-oriented or psycholinguistic approaches, House quoted Nida (1964) as having said that:

> Response-oriented approaches to evaluating translations are communicatively oriented and focus on determining the dynamic equivalence between source and translations, i.e., the manner in which receptors of the translated text respond to it must be equivalent to the manner in which the receptors of the source text respond to the source text. Nida postulated three criteria for an optimal translation: general efficiency of the communicative process, comprehension of intent, and equivalence of response.

The above implies that for theorists such as Nida, a given translation can be said to be successful and of high quality only if it has the same effects on and elicits similar

reactions from its readers as the source text had for its receptors. House (2001:198) also added that such psycholinguists as Caroll posited in 1966 that "intelligibility and informativeness" should serve as appropriate criteria for assessing the quality of translation in addition to "asking the opinion of competent readers". The above ideas seem to be very wonderful but, as some critics say, they are two vague and consequently cannot serve as valid and reliable norms for assessing the quality of translation. If informativeness implies similarity in content between the two texts, one can argue that it has a high probability of being verifiable. Intelligibility in the sense of clarity, however, is one attribute that can hardly be the same with any two readers. This is because a number of variables (level of intelligence, prior knowledge and even the level of concentration) influence the way any reader understands a given text. This implies that there can be no equity in the rate of understanding among readers and this negates the principle of equivalence of response as propounded by Nida. This is compounded by the fact that a good number of literary texts have some cultural elements whose equivalents cannot be found in the target culture. Whether these cultural items are borrowed or adapted in the target text, they can hardly have the same effects on both the source text readers and the target text readers. For instance, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, we have such words as "Idemili," "Udala" "Ogbanje". These same words eventually found their way in the French version of the text "*Le Monde S'effondre*. The understanding the Igbo reader of the text has of these words and the effects the words have on him can never be similar to the experiences of a French reader of the text. This equally shows that there can be no question of equivalence of response in this context.

There is also the text-based approaches which were informed by studies in linguistics and comparative literature. House (2001:198) said:

> In linguistically based approaches pairs of source and target texts are compared with a view to discovering syntactic, semantic, stylistic and pragmatic regularities of transfer.

The theorists in this group include Reiss and Wilss each of whom made some useful contributions to advance the course of translation assessment. Reiss, for instance, suggested that the most important step is to identify the "text-type to which the source text belongs, as it determines all other choices a translator has to make" Wilss, on his part, "stresses the importance in textual analysis of norms of usage in the two language communities and suggests that deviations from these norms be taken as indicators of translation deficiencies" (House 2001: 198). The idea expressed by Reiss that the text-type has to be identified first is very important. This is because the mode of translation differs from one text form to another especially in literary translation. Poetic forms are not usually rendered in the same manner as prose writings. When Wilss talked about the "norms of usage in the two language communities", he was only reechoing the ideas of Roman Jakobson about the uniqueness of each linguistic code. Every language has its norms and these must be respected by every translator as he glides from one language to another.

In the text-based approaches, we also have theorists who drew extensively from comparative literature. Toury is very notable in this group. For him, the source text is not very important and "the literary system of the target culture determines how the issue of translation quality assessment is to be tackled" (House, 2001:198). In this group, we also have the functional theory of translation and the most popular names here are those of Reiss and Vermear. House quoted Reiss and Vermear (1984) as having claimed that the skopos or purpose of any translation is what determines the mode of assessment. For the functionalists, "the way the translated text is adapted to target language and culture norms is then taken as the yardstick for evaluating a translation" (House, 2001:198). It does appear that like Toury, Reiss and Vermear seem not to attach much importance to the source text as a factor to be considered when any translation is to be evaluated. We have deliberately accorded very little

space to the ideas expressed by Toury and Reiss and Vermear in this segment of the work. This is because of the controversial nature of their propositions. We feel, and very strongly too, that every evaluation of translation should take into account the source text in question.

It may be necessary, at this point, to state that in carrying out this research especially in analyzing our corpus, we have drawn extensively from the linguistically based approaches where pairs of source and target texts are compared with a view to discovering syntactic, semantic, stylistic and pragmatic regularities of transfer (House, 2001:198). The proposition of Wilss that "deviations from the norms of usage in the two language communities should be taken as indicators of translation deficiencies: as highlighted by House was also extensively exploited. We have adopted these options because they seem to be more practicable. As against the idea of the functionalists, the whole idea of translation implies the presence of two languages. It is also obvious that we have norms of usage in each linguistic community in view of the unique nature of each language. Consequently, any attempt at evaluating translations should involve a procedure that should recognize the need to analyse the two languages in contact with a view to ascertaining the regularities of transfer" as House observed or the "deviations in the norms of usage of the two languages" as Wilss indicated. Error analysis should therefore be part of every evaluation of translation. This means that Waddington (quoted by Al-Malhi 2014) was right when he said that "error analysis and holistic assessment methods are foremost among the methods of translation evaluation criteria".

Having examined the concepts of translation and evaluation and having examined the approaches to translation quality assessment, we will now take a look at the translation of Nuit de sine of Leopold Sedar Senghor into English. Both the French and English

versions of the poem are presented below while the lines to be discussed are highlighted.

NUIT DE SINE	**NUIT DE SINE**
Femme, pose sur mon front tes mains balsamiques, tes mains douces plus que fourrure.	Woman, lay on my forehead your perfumed hands, hands softer than fur.
Là-haut les palmes balancées qui bruissent dans la haute brise nocturne.	Above, the swaying palm trees rustle in the high night breeze.
À peine. Pas même la chanson de nourrice.	Hardly at all. No lullaby even.
Qu'il nous berce. le silence rythmé. **Écoutons** son chant, **écoutons** battre notre sang sombre, **écoutons.**	The rhythmic silence cradles us. **Listen** to its song, **listen** to our dark blood beat, **listen.**
Battre le pouls profond de l'Afrique dans la brume des villages perdus.	To the deep pulse of Africa beating in the midst of forgotten villages.
Voici que décline la lune lasse vers son lit de mer étale	See the tired moon comes down to her bed on the slack sea
Voici que s'assoupissent les eclats de rire, que les conteurs eux-mêmes	The laughter grows weary the story-tellers even
Dodelinent de la tete comme l'enfant sur le dos de sa mère	Are nodding their heads like a child on the back of its mother
Voici que les pieds des danseurs s' alourdissent, que s'alourdit la langue des choeurs alternés.	The feet of the dancers grow heavy, and heavy the voice of the answering choirs.
C'est l'heure des étoiles et de la Nuit qui songe	It is the hour of stars, of Night that dreams
S'accoude à cette colline de nuages, drapée dans son long pagne de lait.	Leaning upon this hill of clouds, wrapped in its long milky cloth.
Les toits des cases luisent tendrement.	The roofs of the huts gleam tenderly.
Que disent-ils, si confidentiels, aux étoiles?	What do they say so secretly to the stars?
Dedans, le foyer s'éteint dans l' intimité d'odeurs âcres et douces.	Inside the fire goes out among intimate smells that are acrid and sweet.
Femme, allume la lampe au beurre clair, **que** causent autour les Ancêtres comme les parents, les enfants au lit.	Woman, light the clear oil lamp, **where** the ancestors gathered around may talk as parents talk when the children are

	put to bed.
Écoutons la voix des Anciens d'Elissa comme nous exilés	Listen to the voice of the ancients of Elissa. Exiled like us
Ils n'ont pas voulu mourir, que se perdît par les sables leur torrent séminal	They have never wanted to die, to let the torrent of their seed be lost in the sands
Que j écoute, dans la case enfumée que visite un reflet d'âmes propices	Let me listen in the smokey hut where there comes a glimpse of the friendly spirits.
Ma tête sur ton sein chaud comme un dang au sortir du feu et fumant	My head on your bosom warm like a dang smoking from the fire
Que je respire l'odeur de nos Morts, que je recueille et redise leur voix Vivante, que j' apprenne à	Let me breathe the smell of our Dead, gather and speak out again their living voice, learn to
Vivre avant de descendre, au-delà du plongeur, dans les hautes profondeurs du sommeil	Live before I go down, deeper than diver, into the high profondities of sleep.

Analysis of Findings: The above are two versions of one poem – "Nuit de Sine" written by Leopold Sedar Senghor. The French version is the source text while the English version is the translation published forty years ago by the Longman Group Ltd in a book entitled *A Selection of African Poetry*, a literature book highly recommended and used in the Anglophone countries of West Africa.

It has also to be acknowledged that the translation accommodated all the details highlighted by the poet of the source text in their translation. In spite of the positive contributions of this work to the growth of literary translation, we wish, in this research work, to suggest the following modifications which could facilitate the communication of the ideas intended by Leopold Sedar Senghor in his original work.

We have to begin with the title of the poem "Nuit de Sine". This same title is retained in the English version. We do know that borrowing as a technique is allowed in translation practice but its use in this context is not justified. Besides, the French title

alone could scare readers without any background in French. It is obvious that the poet is expressing with nostalgia his memories of a typical African Night. Consequently, we feel that "Night in Africa" would have been a better title for this poem in English.

We also wish to examine the translation of the verb form "**écoutons**" in the poem. This verb form appeared four times in the poem and in all these four places, it is translated as "listen". In French grammar, "**écoutons**" does not mean "listen". The more appropriate meaning is "let us listen" . We also examined the contexts where these verb forms appeared to see whether there was any particular reason for this change of meaning. We could not find any. It is therefore our submission that "Let us listen" or let's listen" should replace "listen" in these contexts. This is the meaning conveyed by the writer of the source text and it captures the actual intent of the poet. Leopold Sedar Senghor is celebrated world wide as the leader of the Negritude Movement and in this poem, he is writing on a theme that is too dear to him. It is unlikely that he would like to use an expression that would alienate him from a situation he is part and parcel of. The use of "listen" creates the impression that he is aloof while all through the poem, he did not leave anybody in doubt about his full presence. This view is supported by his use of: mon front (my forehead) instead of ton front (your forehead). Nous (us) instead of vous/te (you)

These expressions featured in the first stanza even before écoutons. In the last stanza he created the impression that he is solely in change by using Je (I) four times. The grammatical sense the option we proposed makes and these other considerations highlighted are some of the reasons why we feel that this second modification should be made.

Finally, the translation of the first "que" in the fourth stanza as "where" in the English version made it difficult for the target audience to access the actual meaning intended by the writer of the source text. To drive this point home, it may be necessary to substitute the adverb where with the subordinate conjunction that which introduces the clause showing reason or purpose of the preceding action. What a world of difference: At first sight, one might think that there is nothing wrong with the translation as given. Let us examine it closely "Where the ancestors gathered around may talk as parents talk when the children are put to bed". A critical examination of these lines will reveal that they do not quite flow in English and the singular reason is the use of the adverb "where" . There is also the high probability of the meaning being misconstrued. The most plausible meaning conveyed with the presence of "where" is that the woman addressed may have to take some steps to get to where the ancestors are to light the lamp. This may not be very true. We do feel that the writer of the source text is highlighting a very salient aspect of the belief system in Africa. It is known that the Africans believe that the dead are not really dead and that there is regular interaction between the living and the dead especially at night. So the woman does not need to take any further step other than to light the room where the ancestors are already gathered, waiting for the light to commence their deliberations. With this view point in mind, we can understand why **that** should replace **where** at the beginning of that clause.

Discussion on Findings: It is now clear, following the findings in this research work, that there is great need to undertake periodic evaluation of translations so as to sustain quality in the translation industry. In spite of the position of some theorists who are averse to evaluation of translations, the point has to be made that it is quality assurance that drives progress in every human endeavour. Only the Almighty Father is

perfect and since translators are humans, the possibility that they could err inadvertently at one time or the other is always there.

As we highlighted earlier, the English version of the poem we discussed in this work was published forty years ago and, to the best of our knowledge, there has not been any effort to evaluate the translation as we have done in this work. This means that readers of the English version of the poem have grappled with these difficulties all these long years. This underscores the great need to evaluate translations from time to time.

It is known, from linguistic studies, that no two languages are identical structurally and semantically. This is why translators are enjoined to strive to use the linguistic elements of the target culture so as to facilitate the comprehension of the ideas by the target audience. This implies that the adoption of foreignization as a strategy can only impede rather than facilitate communication which is the principal aim of every translator. This explains why we frowned at the retention of the French title in the English version. The other two deviations in the norms of usages, which we pointed out should be addressed to facilitate the comprehension of the beautiful poem given by Leopold Sendar Senghor.

Conclusion

In this work, we examined the subject, Evaluation of Translations and the Translation of Nuit de Sine of Leopold Sedar Senghor into English. We reviewed the two key concepts, translation and evaluation and concluded that translation is the professional activity that makes it possible for a text written in one language to be made accessible in another targeted language while evaluation of translation has to do with the act of making value judgments about a given translation.

We also analysed the English version of "Nuit de Sine" and came up with the suggestion that the title of the English version should be "Night in Africa. We also made some other inputs which could improve the accessibility of the English version of the poem to the target audience.

Finally, it is obvious that there is great need to revise the translation of Nuit de Sine of Leopold Sedar Senghor. With the new title and other modifications suggested in this work, the Anglophone community will begin to appreciate the deep meaning of this poem that highlights vital aspects of the African culture.

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