THE APPLICATION OF LANGUAGE FUNCTION TO THE INTERPRETATION OF *LE CORBEAU ET LE RENARD* FROM FRENCH TO IGBO

Pearl Chimmuanya NGELE
pearlonuoha@yahoo.com/2348058539794
Department of Foreign Languages and Literary Studies,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Abstract

Translation is an art of communication, communication comprises of the text to be comprehended and the psychology of the reader. A translator must create a text that would be comprehensible to the target audience, to effectively create this, one must consider several factors, one of which is culture. This study aims at finding a solution to the problem of depicting European culture to an African audience. The application of systemic functional linguistic is an offered solution. The study presents the appropriation of Le Corbeau et Le Renard from French to Igbo. This illustration proves that language function is an indispensable component of translation.

Key Words*: Semiology; Culture; meaning;appropriation; literary text*

Introduction

This study borders on translation. Translation may be defined as the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language (Catford, 1965:53). Translation is a transfer of message from one language to another. The message in this definition is a product or consequence of the transfer called translation rather than an entity that precedes the action of transfer (Nnamdi-Chukwu 2015:86). Mariane Lederer (1994:05) defines translation as:

> La traduction est un procès de transfert de contenu notionnel et émotionnel d'une langue dans une autre effectué par un traducteur, parfaitement, bilingue totalement identifie à l'auteur du texte originale et conscient des réactions probable de l'auteur de son texte.

Our Translation

Translation is the process of transferring the notional and emotional contents of a text from one language to another, a process carried out by a translator who is perfectly by lingua and possess profound knowledge of source and target environment.

These three definitions affirm that translation is not based solely on language but has other components; the nature of the document to be translated, the source and target language, culture and the purpose for which the translation was initiated.

This study aims at illustrating the importance of language function to translation. It addresses the problem of creating a dynamic equivalent between two unrelated cultures. The research is based on the translation of a fable. Fables often have social functions, a translator must be mindful to reproduce these social functions in the translated versions. The study proposes the semio-pragmatic theory as a means of facilitating this transfer. Language is produced by culture and constrained by environment. This is the view borne by the semio-pragmatic translation theory. This translation theory proposes that the terms employed in the target text be those available in the target culture. Meanings of terms and worlds are a reflection of the environment in which they are employed (Kourdis andKukkonen 2015:NP).

Culture is a representation of the orientation sustained by a group or society. According to Taylor (1974:72) "culture is an entity which includes beliefs, arts, skills, moralities, laws, traditions and behaviors that an individual, as a member of a society, gets from his own society". In other words, culture is the totality of human behavior produce by the society in which this human lives. Literary translation constitutes the focus of this research. Literary texts are characterised by the presence of cultural symbols, these cultural symbols may not have a direct equivalent in another cultural setting. The literary text is not just a combination of verbal signs but it is a culturally-loaded linguistic system, and a consequence of thorough examination before the process of translation is carried out (Popovic 1975:16).

The research explores the place of language function in translation. Before commencing the process of translation, one must investigate the function of the target text. If the translated version is targeted at exposing the receiving reader to the source world/source culture, then semantic translation is employed. This means that the symbols and signs of source text are not appropriated into target context. If the aim of the translation is to pass across the meaning borne by source signs, one may need to appropriate source culture into target context. Christine Nord (1991:33) strongly proposes that the process of translation be based on text function and that is why she said “If the translator has succeeded in producing a functional text conforming to its needs, the target text will be congruent with the target text’s Skopos”.

The central problem of translation practice is finding target language equivalence. Translation may be considered successful if the translated version (target text) meets the need/function of the initiator.

Through the translation of a French text into English and Igbo, language function is applied to translation. The study presents the translation of *Le Corbeau et Le Renard*, a fable written by Jean de la Fontaine from French into Igbo. This research focus is on the production of an Igbo equivalent noting that Igbo language and culture is not related to French. The translation presented in this study is done by employing terms particular to an Igbo audience. French culture is changed to Igbo culture in the target text, this art is called cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation is a manifestation of the interplay between translation, semiology and systemic functional linguistic (SFL). The process of translating, if directed by SFL does not consider words as a form, but focuses on the meaning or product of the sign signified by the word.

1. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Translation

Systemic functional linguistics is an approach in linguistic study relating to the function of language. This approach may be traced to the works of Michael Halliday who acknowledges his teacher John R. Firth as being the initiator of this notion. For Halliday, this theory is centred around the notion of language function, it is an approach to linguistics that considers language as a social semiotic system. On the subject of SFL, Halliday (1976:306) states:

> The linguistic system is a set of environmental or contextual option with input constraints. The options obligatory in the sense that a language user must choose from them under the social condition imposed on the language system..

This position presents systemic functional linguistics as constraining the use of language to social options. A speaker or writer must employ terms provided by the socio-cultural environment. In appreciation of Haliday's proposition, Agbedo ». (2015:107) states: "language is a system, and the choices available in any language variety are mapped using the representation tool of the system network".

This proposition for the use of language is also a reflection of Saussure's structural linguistics. Structural linguistics defines language as having three angles: the sign, the signifier and the signified. The structuralist principle states that a language is a self-contained relational structure, the element of which derive their existence and their value from their distribution and oppositions in text or discourse». (Francis 2017:14). Ferdinand de Saussure is considered the father of structural

linguistics. In his book *Cours de Linguistique Generale* (published after his death by his students C. Bally and A. Sechehaye), an extensive work on modern linguistics is presented.

The relationship between systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and structural linguistics is a function of their concept of *meaning*. The study of a word's meaning as notes Cruise (1990:144) is best grounded in the use of word in sentences and the meaning itself is best derived from the meaning of semantics containing the word. SFL depicts the relationship between language use and environment. This link is also drawn by Mbah who ». (quoting Malinowski) proposes:

> Language is not an autonomous being but an entity, which entirely depends on the society that uses it laid the background to systemic functional linguistics. The context sensitive nature of language exists in two planes; language change in relation to the demand of the society that uses it and the meaning derivable from its structure is context dependent (Mbah 2017:306).

2. Presentation of the selected fable

i. Source text : « Le Corbeau et le Renard »

Maître Corbeau, sur un arbre perché,
Tenait en son bec un fromage.
Maître Renard, par l'odeur alléché,
Lui tint à peu près ce langage :
"Hé ! bonjour, Monsieur du Corbeau.
Que vous êtes joli ! que vous me semblez beau !
Sans mentir, si votre ramage
Se rapporte à votre plumage,
Vous êtes le Phénix des hôtes de ces bois. "
A ces mots le Corbeau ne se sent pas de joie ;
Et pour montrer sa belle voix,
Il ouvre un large bec, laisse tomber sa proie
Le Renard s'en saisit, et dit : "Mon bon Monsieur,
Apprenez que tout flatteur
Vit aux dépens de celui qui l'écoute :
Cette leçon vaut bien un fromage, sans doute. "
Le Corbeau, honteux et confus,
Jura, mais un peu tard, qu'on ne l'y prendrait plus.

ii. English Version: «The Crow and the Fox»

At the top of a tree perched Master Crow;
In his beak he was holding a cheese.
Drawn by the smell, Master Fox spoke, below.
The words, more or less, were these:
"Hey, now, Sir Crow! Good day, good day!
How very handsome you do look, how grandly *distingué*!
No lie, if those songs you sing
Match the plumage of your wing,
You're the phoenix of these woods, our choice."
Hearing this, the Crow was all rapture and wonder.
To show off his handsome voice,
He opened his beak wide and let go of his plunder.
The Fox snapped it up and then said, "My Good Sir,
Learn that each flatterer
Lives at the cost of those who heed.
This lesson is well worth the cheese, indeed."
The Crow, ashamed and sick
Swore, a bit late, not to fall again for that trick.

iii. Igbo Version : « Mbe n'iguloma»

Màázị́ Úgòlòmà bèkwàrà n'élú ósísí

N'ọ́nụ́ yá ọ́kpū jí áhụ̀rụ̀ àhụ́

Ísī yá wèé dọ̀ọ́ Maazị Ḿbè àkpi̍rị́

Ọ̀ wéé méghéé ọ́nụ́ yá sị́

Maazi Úgòlòmà Ị̀ sáálá chí?

Í mààrà ḿmá dị́ úkwùú

N'ézìé ólú ábụ̀ gị́ dị̀kwà óké ụ̀tọ́

Wèé dábàkwà ná ḿmá ǹkè ǹkù gí

Ọ́ bụ̀ gị́ bụ̀ àchàrà ùgòḿmá n'ọ̀dọ́ ńkwụ́ à

Ókwú à bùrù Úgòlòmà ísí

Ò wéé méghèé ọ́nụ́ yá kà ó gósí ólúábụ̀ yà

Íhé ọ́kpụ̀ n'ọ́nụ́ wéé dápụ̀

Ḿbé wéé méé ńgwá ńgwá wèré yá, sị́ yá; ézí ényì ḿ

Màrà nà ónyé nà-étò ónyé òzò nà-àgbà àbùbà síté n'ónyé ọ́ nà-étó

Ji à bụ̀kwà ụ́gwò íhé ḿmụ̀tá ǹkè mụ́ ǹwé ḿ kùzìrí gị́

Íhéré wéé méé Úgòlòmà

Ọ́ ǹụ̀rụ̀ íyí nà Ḿbè á gághí ághọ̀gbú kwá yá ọ̀zọ̀

3. Functional analysis of the translated versions

A fable may be described as a folktale in which animals act as human beings. This study presents three versions of the fable, the first being the source text written by Jean de la Fontaint. The second version is in English, drawn from « the Complete fables of Jean de la Fontaint » translated by Norman. B. Spector. This version is designed for an English audience. The third version is in Igbo language, this translation was done solely for this study, its' target audience is an Igbo audience.

An author will often employ images or symbols drawn from his environment. According to Anieke (sited by Yong 2012:37) a writer's presentation is often a product of observed phenomena. This is because one observes what is found around his/her environment. Images have different symbolisms in different cultures and environments.

The symbols found in this fable are presented in this table:

FRENCH	ENGLISH	IGBO
Maitra	Master	Màázị́
Corbau	Crow	Úgòlòmà
Renard	Fox	Ḿbè
Fromage	Cheese	Ji ahùrù ahù

The Crow

The crow is a big black bird found in Europe and Africa. In many cultures, this bird is considered as a sign of sadness or evil. It is also seen as an intelligent bird. The bird has rich black feathers and a big beak which symbolizes strength. The crow is an omnivorous animal and often feeds on cadaver. These details are important for our analysis, the aid respond to the question: What does this bird represent in this study? The crow is retained in all three versions of the fable. The term *Maitre* employed in the French text shows the power attributed to the bird. This term was retained in English but not in Igbo. Igbo people consider the crow an evil bird and not a strong bird.

The Fox

The fox is an animal very common in Europe, Asia and Australia. This animal hunts and is carnivorous, it can swim and moves mostly at night. In American culture, the term fox exhibits a woman with a fine shape or figure. However, in European culture (such as English and French) the fox is a cunning animal. The English version retains the term fox. The fox is not a sub-saharan animal, for this reason, cultural adaptation is employed in the Igbo version. To successfully translate, one may have to make necessary linguistic and cultural changes. The fox is changed to Tortoise in the Igbo translation.

Cheese

Cheese is made from milk and is a daily food in France. French people eat and celebrate cheese a lot. English people do not celebrate cheese, however, they eat cheese. This is not changed in the English version. Cheese is foreign to Igbo, the term cheese is replaced with yam. The Igbo people eat and celebrate yams a lot. The harvest of yams is marked with a festival: *the new yam festival.* This festival marks the first day of the year in Igbo traditional setting. The *New Yam Festival* often takes place in the month of September.

It is necessary to note that this fable was written in verses, it is a poetic text. Considering the relationship between the two languages, the French and English versions retain the rhymes but it is not so with Igbo.

4. Conclusion

In translation studies, the question of form and meaning, process and product keeps repeating. In our view, form may change but meaning must not change. The semio-pragmatic translation theory meets a desire to express creativity on the part of the translator. Literary texts are characterized by

the presentation of non articulated nuances, these unarticulated symbols must be taken into account while creating the target text. Cultural appropriation is a means a of bridging the gap between the receiver and these non articulated nuances.

In translating, one may wish to express the cultural riches of a particular society to a foreign audience (as seen in Spector's English translation) or recreate the cultural ambiance of the text. The approach selected must meet the stipulated function of the translation exercise.

Finally, translation may be considered an act of communication, communication can *only* be considered successful when the reader or receiver comprehends the message sent. This study proves that *comprehension* and language function should constitute the focus of literary translation.

NOTE: Some references drawn from online sources did not have pages, hence NP (no page) is employed.

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