

The Intercultural Turns in the French Translation of Double Entendre in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*

Olusegun Adegboye GBADEGESIN Ph.D.

gbadegesinsegun1971@gmail.com. +2348024367835

Department of French

Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

Olusanya, Phillips 'Siji Ph.D.

Department of French

Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

and

Salawu Adewuni Ph.D.

Department of French

Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

Abstract

*Translation of literature is a field in translation studies where theories, processes, approaches and principles of translation are amply applied. Since literature mirrors experiences and imagination, culture occupies a central theme in its presentation. To furnish readers with their cultural nuances, authors often use such literary devices as tropes, proverbs, festivals, education, etc. The present study centres on intercultural turns in the French translation of Double Entendre in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. The objectives of this study are to: identify cases of double entendre in *The Lion and the Jewel* and how they are re-expressed in French translation; explain the cultural implication of the use of double entendre in the original text and how this is understood by the translators of the target text; assess the level of intelligibility of translation of double entendre in the target text compared to the impression it makes on readers of the original; analyse cultural turns in reproducing double entendre of the original text in the translation. The study adopts a comparative approach in inter-textual study. Peter Newmark's communicative approach of translation is used to describe to what extent double entendre translated into French as *Le lion et la perle* represents the double entendre in *The Lion and the Jewel*. The study finds out that: double entendre is a culture-based trope and it can be understood only if the two speakers involved are vast in the culture of its usage; readers of the target text may read the product of double*

entendre in the translation as an ordinary play on the actors' intelligence; intelligent use and application of double entendre in drama lends weight to conversations in drama. The study concludes that the use of double entendre by Wole Soyinka in the drama is a cultural challenge in its French translation.

Key words: *Drama translation, intercultural turns, double entendre, African thought versus French re-expression, literary translation*

Introduction

Can language translate culture? This is a popular question often asked when faced with culture transfer into a language that does not share the same cultural use and behaviour as the original language of literature. Wole Soyinka, a well-known playwright, novelist and poet is an African writer whose focus in *The Lion and the Jewel* is on how the traditional Yoruba cultures are gradually being eroded in the face of Western civilization. The playwright brings the past into the present with the use of such devices as mime, flashback and double entendre.

Wole Soyinka, though writing in English, has eyes fully on Yoruba culture. Traditional institutions, marriage institutions, games, songs (songs to praise, songs to mock and songs to celebrate victory) and dance occupy a centre stage in providing comic relief and depicting his society in the play. The use of loan words from the Yoruba language, corruption of certain English words to match a character's role play, elaborate English language to depict the intellectual status of an educated character, import of Christian religion which he presents sarcastically most times, use of Yoruba proverbs adapted to English, local colours, Yoruba cosmology and ambiguity are stylistic imports of the playwright in *The Lion and the Jewel*.

The Lion and the Jewel is the first play of Wole Soyinka to be translated into French by J. Chuto and Ph. Laburthe-Tolra. The effort of these Frenchmen prepares a field of study where the intelligibility of translation of peculiar Yoruba cultural features by the Europeans is assessed based on how distant or close the culture is to them. Since literary translation is not only bilingual oriented but also bicultural in performance, the translation of *The Lion and the Jewel* accounts for the limitability of language translating a culture. As observed by David Katan in Jeremy Munday (2009, 74), 'misunderstanding (in the translation of literature) arose not through language but through cultural differences. In other words, the cultural loss observable in

translation by a non-bi-cultural translator(s) may not be a result of incompetence in language but a lack of performance in cultural exigencies and turns.

Language as a vehicle of culture communicates the intents of the same in literature and interlingua communication. The role of the translator of culture is not in the transfer of the language but lies in his ability to decode the cultural lodes and transfer the same in the cultural spirit of the target audience. This seems very possible if the two cultures involved are substitutable. Federico M. Federici in Kirsten Malmkjaer (2018, 297) states that traditional linguistics perceived meaning as stable within language systems. This perception does not take into account the cultural systems which to a large extent shape the language structure of the message.

A translator of cultural elements and expressions is a cultural mediator. He is a mediator in that he interprets the expressions, intentions, perceptions and expectations of each cultural group. The essence of the mediation is to facilitate communication, understanding, action and conception between two cultures that are different by nature and feature in the translation exercise. Interlingua communication of culture becomes of use when there is a balance of communication between the original people identified with the culture and the target audience who learn about the culture through translation. To Agar (2006, 5) translation as intercultural communication requires “treating the text itself as only one of the cues of meaning”. The translation of the double entendre in *The Lion and the Jewel* will be taken as a unique cultural trope that has implicit meaning uniquely peculiar to the culture of the place setting (Yorubaland) of the play.

2. Intercultural Turns in the Translation of Literature

Languages across societies differ in structure and connotative exigencies. Cultures across societies may not also have the same indicators. This difference creates a bridge translator of literature must build to transfer meaning from one language into another. “Cultures are different in their languages, behaviour patterns and values” (Katan 2009, 74). Because of this reality, the use of monocultural approach to predict shared assumptions and responses to messages may not convey desired product in translation. In humanist parlance, culture embraces the education system, the arts and architecture. It is equally viewed as people’s way of life. Here, tribal practices are implied. Ideology and societal forces constitute forces that depict the unique cultural leanings of a people. In the case of *The Lion and the Jewel*, Yoruba cultural display plays an important role in the development of the plot.

The translation is universal. From intersemiotic to intralingua, and from intralingua to interlingua communication, translation is a linguistic activity that deals with the encoding and decoding of a message. As linguistic as translation activity seems to be, cultural turns in the translation of literature reshape the linguistic structure that interprets the culture-embedded message. Citing Nida, Reddy (1993) submits that “context provides more distinction of meaning than the term being analysed”. In other words, language does not carry the meaning; the translator negotiates the same within the cultural context.

Intercultural turns in literary translation study the interrelation between cultures and languages. Such elements as semiotic codes, language systems, socio-cultural behaviours, cultural identity, sociolinguistic features of the norm, status, gender, power, environment, age, race and so on of culture are viewed against how they are conceived in another culture. Intercultural study of the translation of literature becomes visible and treatable when differences appear in the transfer of cultural codes from one language into another. In effect, the ‘translator treats the text in isolation from the culture at his peril’ (Basnett, 2009). In other words, any translator that does not account for culture in his reproduction of literature cannot be said to be a literary translator. Linguistics as a tool of message transfer may not be able to resolve culture bumps when taken out of the context of culture. Language, therefore, becomes an agent of culture mediation and not a lexical solution to culture transfer.

In the plot development of *The Lion and the Jewel*, Wole Soyinka deploys several stylistic devices. He uses tropes. One of the tropes employed to display the rich culture of Yoruba in oral discourse is double entendre.

3. Double Entendre as a Trope in Drama

A double entendre is a figure of speech that involves two different meanings or interpretations of a word, phrase or sentence; one is apparent and the other is not. In our study of double entendre in *The Lion and the Jewel*, double entendre can be understood as dual meaning; one of which refers to sex. It is a witty and suggestive statement in the play. The author, with a sense of humour, uses a double entendre to state something slightly inappropriate in an indirect way.

The understanding of double entendre lies in the shared understanding of a cultural sense of its use by the speakers involved in the conversation. Though double entendre may engender ambiguity, the effective use of this device is premised upon the author’s ability to calculate the statement subtly so that it is a clever play on words without being so ambiguous that the reader is

not able to get the joke. The predisposition of the audience is a major factor to be considered while using a double entendre between two people. This becomes imperative as misunderstanding the joke may offend a party thereby defeating the humour.

Double entendre in conversation may be interchangeable between the two speakers involved in the communication channel. It is a culture-implied trope. An indirect way of referring to sex or something that is associated with it in *The Lion and the Jewel* with the use of double entendre is a display of intelligence as portrayed by the author through Baroka and Sidi. The challenge of retaining the cultural implicative of this device in *Le Lion et la Perle* by the translators could be traced to cultural differences and the import of the trope in the play.

4. The Intercultural Turns in the French Translation of Double Entendre in *The Lion and the Jewel*

All through the dialogue between Baroka and Sidi, Bale (Baroka) uses double entendre. The words of Baroka are seemingly innocent but are bedevilled with tricky intentions to make Sidi a victim of a sexual game. Sidi behaves naïve but she does not lose complete touch with the joke. The French translation makes an effort to imitate the joke but, in many contexts, fails to preserve the lingua culture.

Double entendre as a trope belongs to the field of pragmatics. The understanding of double entendre is therefore in its interpretation within the cultural context of its usage. Adopting a classical style of writing to present the play, Wole Soyinka employs poetic form to pose a sensual question as observed in the following example:

Example One: Is a man's bedroom

To be made naked to any flea

That chances to wander through? P. 41

Translation: "La chambre d'un homme doit-elle rester grande ouverte à n'importe qu'elle puce qui trouve l'occasion d'y vagabonder ? P.52

Sidi is likened to an uninvited flea that strays into his room unannounced. Baroka who has earlier assigned his eldest wife, Sadiku, to convince Sidi to marry him should ordinarily be expectant of her. However, Sidi is disparaged here because she refuses the proposal and declines the invitation to dine with Baroka. The fake news of Baroka's impotency pushes Sidi to visit Baroka whom she desires to make a public disgrace. The pretence that Baroka does not want her when her presence is his delight makes a double entendre. While the phrase *a man's bedroom* in

Yoruba culture is suggestive of the husband's room which is often occupied by him and the favourite wife who has the man to herself all the time, the French translation: *la chambre d'un homme* presents the room as belonging to just a man (any man). The word (man) in the original equally goes beyond being a male adult. It is a symbol of power, authority, magical force, resilience, courage and bravery. This is not represented enough with the use of the word *homme* in the translation. The impression that Sidi does not have a definite destination is preserved in the translation with the verb *vagabonder* but the damsel does not only have a destination but also has a mission. We conclude that *la chambre d'un mari* would better translate *a man's room* while *s'égarer* (to stray) carries better the meaning of *wander*. Though Sidi enters the house and not Baroka's bedroom, it is clear that the use of the word *room* by Baroka instead of the *house* for Sidi is an indirect way of pointing Sidi to where he would want her to be (his bedroom).

The difficulty in going beyond the surface interpretation of words of the original can make translating double entendre into French a literal exercise as we observe in the following example:

Example Two: Our thoughts fly crisply through the air

And meet purified, as one.

And our first union is the making of this stamp (p.53)

Translation: Nos pensées voguent allègrement parmi les airs, pour fusionner dans la pureté. Et le premier fruit de notre réunion, c'est la production de ce timbre (p.63-64)

Right from the opening of the first line of the verse with the possessive marker 'our' to 'our first union'(is the making of this stamp) in the third line and the use of 'one' in the second line, Baroka is talking of lasting union (marriage) with Sidi. This is a romantic way of dating in typical traditional Yoruba culture. Sidi on the other hand seems to be thinking of merely putting her picture beside that of Baroka on the stamp. This double entendre identifies Baroka as a typical Yoruba man using implicit romantic messages to appeal to the psyche of a young naïve lady. This *trick* is not sufficiently captured with the literal approach adopted by the translators and the French audience may not understand the message in double entendre as presented in the original, the addition of the word *fruit* notwithstanding. To retain the tempo of the use of double entendre in the translation and sustain the character's intention of the usage, one of the features of the communicative approach which is target audience oriented to understand the author's intention is a better bet. For example, if the message is restructured thus: *les pensées de nous, deux s'égarèrent mais par hasard se croisent pure et deviennent une et le premier témoignage de*

cette union est le collage de ce timbre the double entendre should be understood at the same level as used in the original. Differences in the practice of pragmatics among Yoruba and French cultures practitioners should be a reason for the noticeable insufficiency in the re-expression of double entendre in the translation here.

The use of an emic ethnographic approach in the deployment of double entendre spells out subjective beliefs about the appropriateness of the use of semantic universals to provide cultural scripts. This plays out in the following example.

Example Three: The old must flow into the new, Sidi,

Not blind itself or stand foolishly

Apart. A girl like you must inherit

Miracles which age alone reveals (p.54)

Translation: Le vieux doit s'épanouir dans le neuf, Sidi, ne pas s'aveugler et ne pas se sentir stupidement à l'écart. Une jeune fille comme toi doit hériter des merveilles que seul l'âge peut révéler. N'est-ce pas? (p.64)

The message in the original could mean that traditional culture must blend with the new culture. This is contrary to what Lakunle canvasses. Lakunle advocates the new culture should sweep off the old culture and occupy the centre stage of civilization. The same message, in the real sense of the intention of Baroka, talks about him as an old man taking Sidi, a very beautiful damsel as a wife. As says French adage: *c'est dans les vieilles marmites que l'on mange les bonnes sauces*. Baroka's sexual advances as stated in the first line: 'the old must flow into the new' and in the last line: Miracles which age alone reveals should be understood by Sidi. In other words, Baroka is saying that an old man gives the best sexual enjoyment to a young beautiful and charming lady such as Sidi. This culture is shared but with a rhetorical question at the end to call the lady to agree with the French translation. Needful to say that French are generally romantic and it's not surprising that the spirit of Wole Soyinka is captured with the expressions such as : *le vieux doit s'épanouir dans le neuf* and *une jeune fille ...doit hériter des merveilles que l'âge doit révéler*. Addition of the phrase *N'est-ce pas?* (is that not so?) in the translation is a romantic expression here which is common in punctuating dating messages. The expected answer is *Oui* (Yes) or a possible nod of the head in agreement.

Culture bumps whereby allusions are translated literally while their connotative and pragmatic meaning is played down or ignored is a common feature of double entendre. The following

example shows that English (though in Yoruba clothing in Soyinka's play under study) and French preserve the culture bumps.

Example Four: Yesterday's wine alone is strong and blooded, child;

And though the Christian's holy book denies

The truth of this, old wine thrives best

Within a new bottle (p.54)

Translation: 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 (pp. 64-65)

Obviously, Baroka represents yesterday's wine while Sidi is the new bottle. However, Baroka, in this dialogue talks as if he is referring to progress for Ilujinle. The real urge of his message is to get Sidi in his bed. The translation of this double entendre is amplified by culture bumps. Though the pragmatic meaning is not spelt out in this conversation it should be decoded by the actors involved in the dialogue. The connotation of the expression: *Yesterday's wine* may not be deep in the understanding of ordinary young man of modern society as wines they take may be imported ones distilled several weeks or months before consumption. A traditional African man who homes local wine understands better as yesterday's palm wine, for example, intoxicates with heavy influence much more than today's wine (fresh wine). French culture sees the consumption of wine as a way of life and so the translation of its attributes as *fort* and *généreux* (strong and generous) for *strong* and *blooded*. These romantic emblems and differences in their cultural turns satisfy the cultural acceptability of the two cultures. The difference in itself is occasioned by how the two cultures perceive the question of wine and love in a relationship.

Where the understanding of the formal level of culture is properly captured, the possibility of translating the objects of this level to the comprehension of the target reader is high. Except the two cultures are of parallel beliefs in the interpretation of such objects of the culture, understanding the second level of double entendre may be difficult for target readers. The following example presents the Yoruba belief of what a fox is capable of doing and what New-hatched chickens imply.

Example Five: The fox is said to be wise

So cunning that he dines on

New-hatched chickens. (p.46)

Translation: On dit que le Renard est si avisé, si rusé qu'il fait son diner de poussins à peine sortis de l'oeuf ! (p.57)

Sidi in turn uses a double entendre for Baroka, the chief of Ilujinle whose desire is to marry her. Here the message when taken at face value may mean people believe that fox is wise and cunning and loves feeding on chickens. But in the real sense of it, Baroka is here referred to as fox. A fox possesses the characteristics of being cunning and tricky. The new-hatched chickens refer to young ladies of Sidi's age. In other words, Baroka tricks young girls into marrying him. Culture universals play out in the French translation in that *le renard* (the fox) has the same characteristic of loving feeding on *poules* (hens) as the fox. The example may be unintelligible when taken in isolation from the alternative proposition that follows it in example six.

Example Six: or else

He is so tired of the day's affairs
That at night he turns his buttocks
To his wives (p.46)

Translation: Où alors, il est si fatigué par son travail du jour, que la nuit, il montre le derrière à ses femmes (p.57)

The above statement of Sidi clarifies the ambiguity that may ensue as a result of the statements contained in example five. Baroka understands this double entendre perfectly as an old man desiring to sleep with fresh blood. The purpose of Sidi's visit to Baroka is hereby launched. She wants Baroka to try sleeping with her to discover his impotence and make him an object of public disgrace. The French translation imitates the original in English. The two cultures seem to view sex as being best had in the night and that day's activities could make a man so tired that he wouldn't want to have sex with his wives. Another cultural resemblance is the action of turning one's back to one's wife on the bed as a sign of lack of interest in sex at that moment. The two cultures seem to see this as a reality.

One major feature of the astute use of double entendre is the ability of the two parties in dialogue to be able to understand its intent and sense. Baroka does not hesitate to fault the thinking of Sidi that the fox (Baroka) might be so tired at night that he would not have fun with his wives. He replies to the double entendre with another message of the same form as follows:

Example Seven: Perhaps he is a frugal man.

Mindful of years to come,

Planning for a final burst of life, he
Husbands his strength. (pp. 46-47)

Translation: peut-être que c'est un homme tempérant. Soucieux des années à venir, et méditant de finir en beauté, il ménage sa force p.58

It is obvious in the dialogue above that Baroka understands that the idea of turning his back on his wives at night is a sign of failed manhood and that Sidi must have got this 'truth' from Sadiku, his first wife to whom he confided. Baroka aims at a new life and to enjoy the same he says he *husbands* (economizes or reserves) his strength for the new wife for utmost performance. The language of the target text could not maintain the tempo of the contents of this double entendre in the translation. While the original talks about a new life of sex (a final burst of life), the translation talks of *beauty* he will end up with (finir en beauté). *Ménager* gives an impression of a sick person managing carefully his health. There is nothing in the conscious behaviour of Baroka that suggests that he is sickly. The difference in the language culture of English and French in this context is the difficulty in appropriating the trope of the original in the translation. This difficulty wanes the sense of the original message for the target readers.

The assertion of Venutti (2006, 343) that context cannot be regarded in translation as dynamic does not apply to the use of double entendre in drama. Though throughout the seduction scene, Baroka makes Sidi feel he is not interested in her by talking about Ailatu, the youngest and favourite for the moment, his mind is calculative of the best way to prove to Sidi that he is not a weak man in bed.

Example Eight: ...Sadiku straightway

Flings herself into the role of go-between
And before I even don a cap, I find
Yet another stranger in my bed! (p. 49)

Translation: Sadikou se précipite pour jouer les entremetteuses, et avant même que j'aie eu le temps d'enfiler un bonnet de nuit, j'en trouve encore une nouvelle dans mon lit. (p. 60).

The expression, "don a cap" is a cultural act. A man can don a cap in the Yoruba culture of the playwright when he wants to relax at home or a home environment or when he is before a king, chief or important personality. It can equally imply that when he feels his go-between has not succeeded in the assignment given to her, a stranger he does not expect is found in his bed. "un bonnet de nuit" (a nightcap) is an attempt to find a word in the context of night sleep associated

with men. *Enfiler un bonnet de nuit* (to slip on a nightcap) is a sign of being done with an activity. The cultural contexts of English and French usage of the phrase differ but the target readers should be able to get the intention of the message of double entendre in the two contexts. Culture is a very important element of literature. It becomes more sociolinguistic-specific when taken in the light of the double entendre which is a cultural item in the display. The translation of such a trope embedded in the culture of a people is a serious task as the translator has to account for the joke expressed in the original literary text in his product. It is imperative to state that a translator that does not have an ear for humour will likely lose the emotional feeling to re-express double entendre in the target text and the spirit of the original.

5. Conclusion

Translation of drama is unique in literary translation. It is unique in the sense that the translator as a mediator puts himself in the position of characters. In other words, he acts on all the roles of all the characters both verbal and non-verbal roles. Since performance is key to drama, all actions: gesticulations, mimes, force demonstration, villain dramatization, hero personality, the naivety of a major character, singing and dancing, peace and war, kind and miserly actions, etc are tasks a translator of play must decode and transpose in the target text.

The elegant use of language in Soyinka's plays and indeed his choice of classical style, a verse form, to present *The Lion and the Jewel* is what translators of the play have to betray first. The poetic form of writing Soyinka becomes a prosaic form in the French translation. This is acceptable as long as the meaning is retained and the meaningfulness of the message is not compromised.

Double entendre can be identified as a trope in the pragmatics of communicating in a particular culture. It is an important stylistic device in comedy. Its translation as we have seen in our analysis may experience allusion, culturemes, lingua nature, etc approach, style sacrificed for sense and so forth.

To measure whether translation of a double entendre communicates the intention of the original or not Peter Newmark's communicative approach to translation is at the centre. It describes various levels of communication and language from the poetic level as witnessed in the diction of Lakunle, the school teacher, to the familiar level of language and loan words as seen in Baroka's choice of words. The translation is not only a bilingual activity but also bicultural. The

difference in cultures births reformulation and reorganization of language structures of the target language.

References

- Agar, M. 2006. 'Culture: can you take it anywhere?' *International journal of Quantitative Methods*, 5 (2): 1-12
- Basnett, S. and Lefevere, A. 1998. *Constructing Cultures: Essays on literary translation*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters
- Benett, M.J. 1998/2009. 'Intercultural Communication: A current perspective', in Benett, M.J. (ed.) *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication: Selected Readings*, Yarmouth, M.E: Intercultural Press Inc., pp. 22-73
- Taft, R. 1981/2009. 'The role and personality of the mediator', in S. Bochner (ed.). *The Meaning Person: Bridges between Cultures*, Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, pp. 53-88
- Malmkjaer, K.(ed.) 2008. *The Routledge Handbook of translation Studies and Linguistics*. London and New York, Taylor and Francis Group
- Munday, J. (ed.) 2009. *Routledge Companion to Translation Studies*. London and New York, Routledge
- Nida, E.A. 2002. *Contexts in Translating*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins
- Reddy, M.J. 1993/2009. 'The Conduit Metaphor', in A. Ortony (ed.) *Metaphor and Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 164-201
- Soyinka, W. 1964. *The Lion and the Jewel*. Ibadan, Oxford University Press
- Soyinka, W. 2001. *Le lion et la perle*. (traduit en français par Chuto, J. et Laburthe-Tolra). Yaounde, Editions CLE
- Venuti, L. (ed.) 1992. *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, subjectivity, ideology*, London and New York, Routledge