

# CREATIVITY AND TRANSLATION IN NIGERIAN LITERATURE: YORUBA AUTHORS IN FOCUS

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The paper examines the role of translation in modern Nigerian literature in English through selected sample texts of poetry and drama. Plays and poems by authors of Yoruba extraction were chosen with a view to study their creative works written in English and the oral materials from which the works have been carved. Works of notable Yoruba authors like Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan reveal that indigenous materials such as proverbs, panegyric, chants and incantations are a major part of the literary texts and are brought in mostly through translation. It is a discovery however, that there is sometimes a huge gap in meaning between what exists in the oral form of the indigenous/source language and what is expressed in the texts in English language. The study reveals that authentic or complete equivalence in translation which seeks to preserve all of the information in the text while preserving it in good form is a mirage.

Cet article examine le rôle de la traduction dans la littérature nigériane moderne en anglais à travers des morceaux choisis de poésie et de théâtre. Les pièces de théâtre et les poèmes d'auteurs d'origine Yoruba ont été choisis en vue d'étudier leurs travaux créatifs écrits en anglais et le matériel oral à partir duquel il a été façonné. Les travaux d'auteurs connus tels que Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi et Femi Osofisan indiquent que le matériel indigène tels que les proverbes, les panégyriques, les chants et les incantations constituent une partie importante des textes littéraires et sont convoqués surtout à travers la traduction. Il faut cependant noter qu'il y a parfois un grand écart entre ce qui existe dans la forme orale de la langue indigène/source et ce qui est exprimé dans les textes en anglais. L'étude révèle que c'est de la pure utopie de penser qu'on peut réaliser une traduction parfaitement équivalente ou complète en préservant toute l'information dans le texte dans une forme adéquate.

## 0. INTRODUCTION

Critics and writers of African literature have continually attested to the fact that African literature derives a substantial amount of its convoluted form and contents from the continent's oral tradition and heritage. The works of African authors, especially those of the older generation are full of elements of African oral arts both at the linguistic and artistic levels. Irele (2009:78) testifies to this when he says "the best among our modern African writers have had to undertake a resourcing of their material ... in the traditional culture". Agreeing that African literary writings are sourced from the indigenous culture presumes that such materials have been erstwhile expressed in a native language, language being the medium of literature. One can therefore say that African literature is built on an antecedent in oral tradition that has been previously expressed with indigenous linguistic codes. The interconnectivity of language and literature is as strong as the relationship between a vehicle and the object of conveyance. Kunene (2009:315) illustrates the relationship between literature and its medium of expression saying:

We can only comprehend in a small way the identity of the writer – his/her religious belief, folklore, myth, proverbs, superstition, humour, attitude to life and death – in other words the totality of his/her world view, if we know his/her language.

Hence the need to critically assess the language of some literatures of the African continent and the place of translation in rendering such original works in English as they are presently studied.

Most of the existing African literature texts of global significance are written in English though this has generated a lot of controversy in the past. Two polar attitudes have emerged over what should be the language of articulating African literature. One faction believes that writing in any of the plethora of languages in Africa is tantamount to undertaking an adventure in obscurity. This perspective is projected properly by Owomoyela (2002) who explains that “literature in African languages have received little scholarly attention, in part because of a Western bias in favour of literature in European languages”. Wali’s (2009:282) popular submission that writing in any of the popular foreign languages is “merely pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity and frustration” captures the submission of the opposing camp in this regard.

What is of relevance to us here is the influence of native culture, tradition and language plus the function of translation in the making of modern African literature in English. The factors that lead to the adoption of English as the language of African literature fortuitously convert the African creative writing experience to an exercise in translation as well. Kunene (2009:315) observes the place of translation in African literature and says “bits and pieces of the African-language-based literatures were siphoned into the stream of ‘African’ literature through translation”. Translating from ‘African’ into English language becomes more expedient when the playwrights are dealing with subjects of historical and cultural import, or when they are using such matters to navigate more contemporary issues. To this end, Osofisan (2001:59) says “the dramatist, groping with the problem of space, will rapidly discover that he is not really called upon to innovate, but merely to translate”. This practice is more pronounced in the works of West African writers especially those of Nigerian descent and this forms one of the reasons for narrowing this study down to only Nigerian writers. Nigerian authors have drawn heavily from the myth, culture and history of their people in the creation of their literary works thus their works form the data base from which the translation carried out by African writers will be examined closely.

# 1. THE TRANSLATION PROCESS

Translation as one of the concepts that feature regularly in a study of relationship between literary and non-literary texts has been given considerable attention by authors and critics, especially in literature. An easy way to understand translation lies in its conception as the rendering of what has been spoken in one language, usually regarded as the source language, in another language, the target language. The source language is the original text while the target language is the language of translation. Venutti’s (1995:17) definition of translation affirms this. In his words:

Translation is a process by which the chain of the signifiers that constitute the source language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language text which the translator provides in the strength of an interpretation.

It is obvious from the above that appropriate words in the target language are used to replay words in the source language thereby transferring the meaning essence of the message between the two languages. Gonzalez et al's definition equally dwells on the aspect of transference of ideas between two languages. They say,

The term translation refers to "the general process of converting a message from one language to another and also, more specifically to the written form of the translation process. (Gonzalez et al 1991: 295)

From Gonzalez et al here, we are able to deduce that translation is often associated with the written form of language while interpretation has to do with the spoken form. Kolawole's (2005) explication relates the implication and essence of translation to a grasp of the sense of what is being communicated. To him, the effectiveness of the translation endeavour is contingent upon the right perception of the meaning by users of the target language. He explains that

It is sense, whether referential or situational, which is transferred and hence remains constant while the form changes. Thus the meaning that is being communicated may be summarized as cognitive, communicative or associative, all of which are normally involved in any translation...

The constancy of sense at the expense of form leads to different types of translation in the end. Certain factors are responsible for a positive translation endeavour. Those factors include: the translator, the message and the audience. There can be direct or indirect translation in that "every variety of meaning in a source language text (SLT) can be translated directly or indirectly into a target language text (TLT)" (Kolawole, 2005:16-17). As a result, some translations appeal straight to the perception of sense in the target language rather than futilely wait on word substitution which may not produce the intended meaning. The need to convey meaning from one language to the other places the requirement of competency in both languages upon a good translator. To this end the authors chosen for this study are educated Nigerians who, apart from having a native knowledge of their mother tongue, are versed in the English language through interaction with the language and via education and native speakers.

Translation theories take account of whether the translator understands the source text and whether the target audience is likely to understand his translation. Thus the transfer of the correct meaning is the essence of translation. As Larson (1998), Nida (1964) among others say, the translation must be natural to the TL as well as be accurate in meaning.

A very important issue in translation as evident in the words of Larson is the necessity of the translator to have an in-depth knowledge of the culture of both the target and source languages. This view buttresses and authenticates the relevance of Sapir's (1929) work as well as Whorf's (1941) work on language later known as Sapir-Whorf's hypothesis (linguistic relativism which strongly recognises the influence of language and

culture on the thought system). Hence, the present analysis is hinged on the theory of linguistic relativism which is a contrary theory to linguistic universals. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis combines linguistic determinism with linguistic relativity. By linguistic determinism, language determines our thoughts, ideas and the way we view social reality around us.

On the other hand, linguistic relativism which is our concern here, states that language influences our thoughts and the way we dissect objects in the world. Sapir stresses that “the fact of the matter is that the real world is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group”. One sees and hears and otherwise experiences very largely as one does because the language habits of one’s community predispose certain choices of interpretation (Akindele and Adegbite, 2005:6).

Linguistic universals hypothesis was formulated to criticise that of linguistic relativism. Linguistic universals, according to Chomsky (1965), the proponent of the theory states that the world in which human beings live is the same and that it is the labels of things that differ. In this regard, translation between languages involves just a substitution of labels from one language to another. Hence, linguistic universalists concentrate more on describing the linguistic features that languages share rather than those which separate them.

In spite of the fine arguments put up for linguistic universals and the fact that languages have many features in common, invariably the many problems associated with translation shows that translation is more than a mere substitution of forms and this remains a strong argument against the hypothesis. The present analysis will reveal errors or problems associated with translation. And what is more, it hopes to affirm that “although the possibility of translation justifies linguistic universals ... the impossibility of total translation shows that perception is relative to some extent. Thus in a weak sense, the linguistic relativist posits that language does not solely determine the way we structure our social reality. It affects the way we think, however” (Akindele and Adegbite, 2005:7).

## 2. TRANSLATION EQUIVALENCE

Equivalence is a key concept in the translation process in general and in linguistic theories of translation in particular. Ideally, equivalence is a bilingual synonymy or sameness based on lexical universals and cultural overlaps (As-Safi 1996:11). Uwajeh (2007) says the central problem of translation is that of equivalence. Linguistic equivalence is a crucial aspect of achieving the goal of translation. The concept of equivalence can be considered as a relationship that exists between source text and target text that allows the target text to be considered as a translation of the source text in the first place.

The typologies of translation equivalence found in literature range from a two-way distinction (Nida 1964, As-Safi 1996, Baker 2005) to a four way distinction (Uwajeh, 2007). The two-way distinction is captured in these terms: literal or denotative equivalence versus non-literal or connotative equivalence). In literal equivalence, equivalence is sought by means of substitution of ‘equal’ verbal signs for those in the original. That is, in this type, a single expression in the target text is for a single source language expression. Thus, formal equivalence underlies literal translation unlike non-literal translation which is dynamic. In non-literal (dynamic) translation attempts are made to create similar response on the target language readers so as to make translation

communicative. The four-way translation include: conceptual equivalence or word level equivalence, propositional or thought pattern equivalence or sameness of subject matter and contextual equivalence.

Free translation according to Kekai (2013:11) “refers to a kind of rendition that reproduces the general meaning of the original text. It may or may not follow the form of or the syntactic organization of the original text. Free translation is therefore a simpler and less slavish rendering of the SLT. It is less bound to the individual words and sequence of the source language”. Moreover, this type is usually put inside the apostrophe mark. Lexical translation or word for word translation “seeks for equivalence in both meaning and form of the SLT by translating lexical item-by-lexical item or concept by concept in the TLT” (ibid 2013:12). Kekai states further that in lexical translation, conceptual equivalence is achieved only if the world view of the TT (target text) corresponds with the ST (source text). Loaning occurs when they do not correspond. Literal translation according to Kekai (2013:13) “is a rough translation of the source language world view”. Figurative translation “is a special effect translation that seeks to express the message given in the ST by indicating with a TLT the peculiarities as regards culture, world view and other contextual factors that are communicated metaphorically in the ST” (Kekai 2013:14). She states further that in this type therefore, the concepts in the SLT are not translated as done in lexical translation, neither is there a corresponding link between the concepts of the ST and the TT. Rather a figurative meaning of the corresponding ST is preserved. Equivalence in word, sentence, and text levels of translation as highlighted in the foregoing cannot be hundred percent achieved. This will become very obvious as we consider the Yoruba to English data here. The data will be analysed using the two-way distinction pattern.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 PROVERBS

Proverbs and their use in speech are an integral part of the oral tradition of the people of Nigeria irrespective of tribal or linguistic inclination. These words, believed to be the stock in trade of old people, are wise sayings that deal with every aspect of life. Proverbs can also shroud some parts of one’s speech in secrecy, leaving only the ‘initiated’ to decode the hidden message in the words. Proverbs are believed to differ considerably from everyday speech (Abiodun 2000:23). Okwelum (2004; ix) says “proverbs give the spoken or written African word the richness and maturity that time gives to palm wine which is appreciated in typical African society”. Proverbs, according to Lyons (1968:177) are “ready-made utterances that are passed on from one generation to the next”. Scholars in Yoruba studies like Delano (1966, 1973) Fadipe, (1970) have attested to the pragmatic import of Proverbs among the Yoruba. What is of interest here is the processes of translation that go into the conversion of the proverbs to their present linguistic form.

Rotimi is famous for his employment of proverbs in the attainment of sublimity in the speech of his tragic heroes. His two historical tragedies; *Kurunmi* and *Ovonramwem Nogbaisi* and his *The Gods Are Not to Blame* adapted from the Greek mythological play, *Oedipus Rex* all have kings as tragic heroes. These royal characters, by virtue of their positions as kings are expected to be custodians of the peoples’ culture and tradition,

including the speech tradition of using proverbs as guide for their listeners. In the speeches of these kings we find the following instances of the use of proverbs:

- (1) a. The hyena flirts with the hen, the hen is happy, not knowing that her death has come.  
 (2) a. All lizards lie prostrate: how can a man tell which lizard suffers from bellyache?  
 (23)  
 (3) a. The Gaboon viper dies, its children take up its habit, poison and all. The fire dies, its ashes bear its memory with a memory of white fluff.  
 (4) a. No termite ever boasts of devouring rock.  
 (5) a. When the chameleon brings forth a child, is not that child expected to dance?

All the proverbs, and many others used in the play are taken from Yoruba folkloric heritage but have been used in varying forms brought in by the creativity of the playwrights. These proverbs are given below in their original Yoruba form, followed by a morpheme by morpheme translation, a literal translation and finally by a translation that simply conveys the sense in what is being said, that is, the gloss.

- (1) b. **Àsá ní bá ẹyẹlé ní ẹẹ eré, ẹyẹlé ní yô láì mò**  
 Kite PROG be pigeon PROG do play, pigeon PROG joy without know  
**pé ikú ti dé**  
 COMP death PERF come  
 ‘The kite is playing with pigeon and the pigeon is happy without knowing that death has come.’  
 ‘Carefulness is the antidote of danger.’
- (2) b. **Gbogbo alángbá ni ó da inú délè, a kò mọ èyí tí**  
 All lizard FOC ANPH put stomach down, 2PL NEG know DEM PERF  
**inú ní run**  
 stomach PROG ache  
 ‘All lizards lie prostrate; we don’t know which one suffers from stomach ache.’  
 ‘There is no art to the mind’s construction on the face’.
- (3) b. **Iná kú fi eérú bo ojú, ògèdè kú fi ọmọ rẹ rópò**  
 Fire die take ash cover eye, plantain tree die take child his replace  
 ‘The fire die, it covers itself with ashes; a plantain tree dies, it replaces itself with its offspring.’  
 ‘A man does not die without leaving his memory behind’.
- (4) b. **Àbá ni ikán ní dá ikán kan kò lè jẹ òkúta**  
 Attempt FOC termite PROG make termite QUANT NEG PRVB eat stone  
 ‘Termite is making an attempt, no termite can eat stone.’  
 ‘It is difficult to achieve impossibility’.

- (5) b. **Aláḡẹmọ ti bímọ rẹ àìmò ó jó kù sí ọwó**  
Chameleon PERF bear.child pass NEG.know HTS dance remain be hand  
**ọmọ aláḡẹmọ**  
child chameleon  
'The chameleon has given birth to its child, inability to dance is left with its child.'  
'The ball is in your court'.

In the same vein, the following proverbs are also taken from Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* in certain circumstances when the imageries contained therein need to be drawn.

- (6) Dada may be weak but he has a sibling who is truly fearless (42).  
(7) The river that fills up before our eyes does not sweep us away in its flood (69).  
(8) When the wind blows cold from behind, that's when the fowl knows his true friends.

These are also translated in the same three levels as the previous ones:

- (6) b. **Dàdà kò lẹ jà, o ní àbúrò tí ó gbójú**  
Name NEG PRVB fight 3PL PART junior PERF RESP bold  
'Dada may be weak, he has a fearless sibling.'  
'A weak person always has a strong relative/friend who can fight his cause'.
- (7) b. **Omi tí ó ti ọjú eni kún kǐ gbeni lẹ**  
Water REL RESP PERF eye person full NEG carry.person go  
'The river that fills up before one's eye cannot sweep off one.'  
'A problem whose origin one is privy to cannot overwhelm one'.
- (8) b. **Afẹfé ti fé, a ti rí fùrò adìye**  
Wind PERF blow 3pl PERF see anus hen  
'The wind has blown; we have seen the anus of the hen.'  
'The secret has been revealed'.

These original versions of the proverbs invariably reveal the inalienable gap between the translation and the original. From these four levels of translations, it becomes obvious that literal translation does not always lead to literal meaning. Even when what is said has been given literally in English, the sense may not always be inherent in the translation.

Proverb 6 in the original version means "Dada cannot fight but he has a sibling who is bold". The second proverb, for instance, is a declarative sentence in the source language which has been changed to a rhetorical question in the English language. It is the equivalence of the Shakespearean expression: "there is no art to find the mind's construction on the face" (*Macbeth*, 1962:57). The same applies to the fifth proverb where the playwright in the process of translation also substitutes the real sentence with a rhetorical question as a result of contextual exigencies. Proverb 4 in Yoruba does not merely say "no termite boasts of devouring a rock" but includes an additional phrase now

meaning “the termite only make attempts, no termite can devour a stone”. The Yoruba of the last proverb literally means the wind has blown and we have seen the buttocks of the fowl. “Buttocks” in this sense really means ‘nakedness’ or ‘secret’. As evident from the foregoing, although in form what we have is literal translation of these proverbs, the gloss, however reveals the fact that semantically they carry non-literal meaning. The playwright has simply adjusted the traditional way of saying the proverb to reveal the fact that only the enemies of the fowl would be interested in its shame when laid open. Thus, it seems that perfect translation between two languages is impossible, not even in writing. What translators do is mainly paraphrasing especially in creative ventures such as these ones.

### 3.2 THE PANEGYRIC

Panegyric poetry is an integral part of African oral forms and this has found its way into the written literature by Nigerian writers of Yoruba descent. Ruth Finnegan attests to the fact that panegyric poetry, that is, praise poetry is an important part of African oral traditional heritage. The Yoruba particularly place premium on acknowledging laudable deeds and attributes through praise poetry. In Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, the lead character, Lejoka Brown, an astute politician is lauded in the following song of praise rendered both in Yoruba and English by the playwright:

- |                                     |                                                |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| (9) <b>Agemo o se je</b>            | The chameleon is no food                       |
| <b>Agemo o se je</b>                | Indeed the chameleon is no food                |
| <b>Eniba f’ori so’le a</b>          | The impact of the human head on hard ground    |
| <b>Fo’ju so’kun</b>                 | commands tears from the eyes!                  |
| <b>Lejoka-Brown l’anteriba</b>      | The reality of Lejoka-Brown’s presence itself  |
| <b>Fun</b>                          | commands instant awe!                          |
| <b>Igi t’o lowun o f’oju di</b>     | A tree that seeks a taste of brute humiliation |
| <b>Ajanaku</b>                      |                                                |
| <b>A fori s’ole, erin a gori re</b> | may dare the reality of an elephant            |
| <b>Koja</b>                         |                                                |
| <b>A k’ori s’igbo</b>               | in a headlong thrust!                          |
| <b>Agemo o se je</b>                | Indeed the chameleon is no food!               |

Apparently the author prefers this praise poem in the native language but thinks he should consider his non-Yoruba audience hence the accompanying translation. The translation is however grossly inadequate because the author does a lot of approximation which actually mutilates the meaning of the text. The text can be literally translated as:

- (9b) The chameleon cannot be eaten.  
 The chameleon cannot be eaten.  
 Whoever hits his head on the ground will cry.  
 It is for Lejoka-Brown we bow.  
 The tree that dares the Ajanaku  
 Will hit its head on the ground,

and the elephant will trample on it.  
It will face the bush.  
The chameleon cannot be eaten (ix)

Apart from the inherent misalignment of text to gloss in the author's translation first seen above, the literal translation in (9b) clearly depicts the semantic gap between the Yoruba and the English versions. Even the use of diacritical marks in the Yoruba is abandoned by the author after the second line. The essence of the poetic display is to extol the valour of Lejoka-Brown and portray him as one that no enemy should attempt to dare. 'Ajanaku' is a proper noun used to refer to the elephant as a brave and powerful animal. Lejoka-Brown's boldness is being compared to that of the elephant while his invincibility makes him analogous to the chameleon, in his admirers' estimation. The author's decision to first write in Yoruba in a play written in English is the first pointer to his admission that what is being said cannot be fully grasped if written solely in English. His attempt at translation is to make his non-Yoruba audience/readers merely trudge along.

### 3.3 CHANTS AND INCANTATIONS

The use of chants, incantations and other metaphysical means of manipulating other human beings, a practice common in pre-literate Yoruba societies, is amply reflected in the literary works of Yoruba authors who lift such chants from the oral repertoire into their own works through translation. The rendition below is an anonymous but popular Yoruba chant compiled by Soyinka and published along with others as *Poems of Black Africa* 1975. His particular one is simply titled 'Traditional (from the Yoruba) we find the following poetic composition.

(10) a. The hunter dies  
And leaves his poverty to his gun.  
The blacksmith dies  
And leaves his poverty to his anvil.  
The farmer dies  
And leaves his poverty to his hoe.  
The bird dies  
And leaves his poverty to his nest.  
You have died  
And left me abandoned in the dark.  
Where are you now?  
Are you the goat  
Eating grass round the house?  
Are you the motionless lizard  
On the hot mud wall?  
If, I tell you not to eat earthworms  
It's like asking you to go hungry.

But whatever they may eat in heaven,  
 Partake with them.  
 A dead body cannot receive double punishment:  
 If there is no cloth to cover it-  
 There will always be earth to cover it. (283)

This is taken from a Yoruba performance poetry which reads thus:

- (10) b. **Ọḍẹ kú**  
**Ó fi ọ̀sì rẹ̀ sílẹ̀ de ìbon rẹ̀**  
**Alágbèḍẹ kú**  
**Ó fi ọ̀sì rẹ̀ sílẹ̀ de ìtẹ̀ rẹ̀**  
**Agbe ku**  
**Ó fi ọ̀sì rẹ̀ sílẹ̀ de ọ̀kó rẹ̀**  
**Ẹ̀yẹ kú**  
**Ó fi ọ̀sì rẹ̀ sílẹ̀ de ìtẹ̀ rẹ̀**  
**O ti kú**  
**O fi mí sílẹ̀ sínú òkùnkùn**  
**Ibo lo wà báyi í ?**  
**O di ewúré jelejele**  
**O di alángbá ara egbẹ̀ ògiri**  
**Ma j'ọ̀kùn, má j'ekòlò**  
**Ohun tiwon ba n je ni ajule orun ni ki o ba wọ̀n jẹ.**  
**Ìyà ilọpo méjì kí i j'òkú**  
**Tí kò bá s'áṣọ láti fi bòó**  
**Ilẹ̀ yóò wà láti fi sin ín.**

- (10) c. The hunter dies  
 And leaves his poverty to his gun  
 The blacksmith dies  
 And leaves his poverty to his hoe.  
 The bird dies  
 And leaves his poverty to his nest.  
 You have died  
 And left me abandoned in the dark.  
 Where are you now?  
 You have become the goat  
 Eating grass round the house  
 You have become the lizard on the wall  
 Do not eat earthworm nor caterpillars

Eat rather whatever they eat in heaven  
A dead body cannot receive double punishment:  
If there is no cloth to cover it-  
There will always be earth to cover it. (283)

What obtains here is a literal translation affected by the author's creative inclination. This particular praise poetry is a popular one among the Yoruba and everyone – adult and children – are all familiar with it. To make this acceptable to his audience, the author has put it in English though in the process he has altered the linguistic structure and the meaning. A reading of the chant in English in light of its Yoruba version will reveal the gap in the semantic implication of the two versions. While some of these discrepancies are inadvertently left there by the translating author, it is obvious that even a conscious effort at achieving a perfect translation may not succeed after all. For instance it is the author who has deliberately turned the middle part of the chant into rhetorical questions. The last part is also traditionally rendered as “eat neither earthworms nor caterpillars, whatever they eat in heaven, that you also eat with them”. Instead of that simple imperative, he says he would not command the object not to eat earthworms and caterpillars since that may be the norm over there. This variation is born out of his urge to be creative and play with words. The word ‘cover’ in the last two lines of the English version is used to mean both to cover with cloth and to cover by burying in the earth. We can thus see that at the meeting point of translation and creativity, the writers prefer to exalt their creative gambit over the exigencies of translation.

In a mood similar to the above, the following is also chanted by Iyaloja in Soyinka's *Death and the king's Horseman* 1975 to Elesin at the time when he needs supernatural strength to carry out the mission of taking his own life:

(11) a. It is the death of war that kills the valiant,  
Death of water is how the swimmer goes  
It is the death of markets that kills the trader  
And death of indecision takes the idle away  
The trade of the cutlass blunts its edge  
And the beautiful died the death of beauty.  
It takes an Elesin to die the death of death...  
Only Elesin ... dies the unknowable death  
Of death ...  
Gracefully, gracefully does the horseman  
Regain  
The stables at the end of day, gracefully ... (2010: 43)

(11) b. **Ikú ogun ni í pa akíkanjú**  
**Ikú odò ni í p'òmùwẹ**  
**Ikú ojà ni í pa oníṣòwò**  
**Ikú àinípinnu ní mú ọlẹ lọ**

Òwò tí àdà bá mọ ní í kà àdà léyín  
 Ikú ẹwà ní í pa arẹwà  
 Lọ Ẹlẹsin láti kú ikúkíkú  
 Ẹlẹsin nìkan ... kú ikú àìmọ  
 Tí ikú  
 Yíyẹ yíyẹ ni Ẹlẹsin n jí  
 Tító opin ojo yíyẹ

The expression “die the unknowable death of death” in the incantation above really is meant to reveal a part of the Yoruba belief about the mystery of death and human existence which is not properly rendered in the English form. What we have here is literal and non-literal translation though that still did not attain the level of equivalence necessary to have a full grasp of the meaning of the incantation. Rendered purely literally the chant will read thus:

- (11) c. Death of war is what kills the valiant,  
 Death of water is what kills the swimmer  
 Death of markets is what kills the trader  
 Death of indecision is what takes the idle away  
 The trade of the cutlass is what cuts its teeth  
 Death of beauty is what kills the beautiful.  
 It takes an Elesin to die the death of death...  
 Only Elesin ... dies the unknown death  
     Of death ...  
 Gracefully, gracefully does the horseman  
 Regain  
 The stables at the end of day, gracefully ...

Both translations are mere trials at transferring meaning across languages. The word ‘unknowable’ and ‘unknown’ in both translations are trying to convey the meaning of the word **aimo** which really is what is not known. The death of death may not fully capture the essence of **ikukiku** but it is the closest the playwright can get to in the English language.

### 3.4 INDIGENOUS/UNTRANSLATABLE WORDS

In many other instances, translation is left incomplete by the inclusion of some words which the authors find rather difficult if not impossible to translate. The difficulty often arises because of the gap in the cultural practices and beliefs of both the users of the target and source languages. It thus becomes an assiduous task to find appropriate equivalent for some of such words in the target language. Here are examples from Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*:

- (12) To search for leaves to make **ètùtù**  
 Opened wide enough to take a ha'penny **róbó**  
 One day he cast his time-smoothed **òpèlè**  
 Brother to a **sigidi**, bring home my wine ... (12-13)

The playwright has to leave the words **ètùtù**, **róbó**, **òpèlè** and **sigidi** in that form because it is believed that the exact equivalent may not be found and meaning may be distorted. These words are then italicised to show that they are not English words and the writer attempts an explanation of their meaning at the Glossary after the play. This is what we find:

|               |                                                               |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>etutu</b>  | placatory rites or medicine                                   |
| <b>robo</b>   | a delicacy made from crushed melon seeds, fried in tiny balls |
| <b>opele</b>  | string of beads used in Ifa divination                        |
| <b>sigidi</b> | a squat, carved figure, endowed with the powers of an incubus |

This becomes supplementary to the translation in the text because the entire song and chants in that session of the play are taken from traditional African oral performances. With such sentences as this, it becomes obvious that what any reader of the play is reading is a piece of incompletely translated material. The authorial translation given above does not contain total equivalence yet it simply cannot go beyond this point. The full sense of the words can be grasped further only if a reader sees the items in their local settings. However the phrase 'ritual sacrifice' may help a non-native speaker get a better understanding of the word **etutu** while 'short spirit being' may improve the comprehension of **sigidi**. **Opele** and **robo** can certainly not be taken beyond this point.

There are instances where creative writers have had to render some words in both the indigenous and target languages to make the semantic implication clearer to the reading/viewing audience. Osofisan's drama is replete with such cases and below is an example from his *The Engagement 2002*:

- (13) a. **Mo ʃiʃé ʃiʃé mo pàdé owó**  
 I toiled and toiled, till I found Wealth  
**Mo ʃòwò ʃòwò mo pàdé ọlá**  
 I traded and traded, till I met Well-being  
**Mo roko roko mo pàdé adé**  
 I farmed and farmed, till I found Kingship  
**Ójò pewé kokò**  
 Rain, pelt the cocoyam leaf  
**Bó lè ya, kó ya**  
 See if it will tear... (40)

The translation under each line is written as the playwright gave it in the play. He actually prefers to leave the song in the Yoruba form but consideration for his non-Yoruba audience/reader is certainly the reason he offers some translation into English as seen above. His translation apparently geared at giving the readers an idea of what he means,

not to transmit the exact meaning. The discrepancies between his English version and the meaning of the lines can be seen in the morpheme by morpheme and literal translations below.

(13) b. **Mo şise şisé mo pàdé owo**

1sg labour labour 1sg meet money

'I toiled and toiled, I encountered wealth.'

**Mo sòwò sòwò mo pàdé ọlá**

1SG trade trade 1sg meet honour

'I traded and traded, encountered honour.'

**Mo roko roko mo pàdé adé**

1SG farm farm 1SG meet crown

'I farmed and farmed, I found crown.'

**òjò pewé kókò**

Rain kill leaf cocoyam

'Rain wet the cocoyam leaf.'

**Bo lé ya kó ya**

COMP MOD tear COMP tear

'If it can tear, let it tear.'

The authors' English translation accompanies only the first rendition of the song in the play. Subsequent renditions of the same song are written only in the native language with the assumption that non-native speakers who cannot remember the meaning can refer back to the translation first offered, as shown above. Even then, we can see clearly that the playwright simply approximates the meaning of the clauses he uses here. Starting from the rear, **Bó lè ya, kó ya** really means "if it can tear, let it tear" and not "see if it will tear" written there by the author as the translation. The meanings of these two expressions are truly worlds apart because while the first indicates a testing of the effects of rain on the cocoyam leaf, the latter implies a daring on the part of rain. In the third line of the song, **adé** in the literal sense means 'crown' but the crown, kingship and the throne are sometime taken to be synonymous in Yorubaland and the author's translation is based on that assumption. The sense of what the playwright hopes to pass across can be seen more clearly in the following translation of the five line song:

- (13) c.     My hard work made me wealthy  
               My hard work gave me honour  
               My hardwork makes me the head  
               Whatever war/trouble is coming  
               Let it come.

The above captures the semantic implication of the song more than the author's translation has done and reveals the reason the author has to leave the song in the indigenous language though with an accompanying inadequate translation.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

As evident in the foregoing, translation is usually literal or non-literal. All the examples here exhibit literal translation. And that is the more reason we are of the opinion that some of these examples are mere indigenous languages rendered in Nigerian English. Some of the data used here are written in Yoruba, some in English and some are a mixture of both. In all the instances, it is translation at play throughout. Nigerian creative writers are therefore translators of sorts since their works are, to a considerable extent, a rendering of indigenous words and thoughts in English language. In cases where the authors still strongly feel the renditions must appear in the original code, we find them using both languages simultaneously by accompanying the Yoruba songs/chants with their English translations. Instances such as this attest to our claim that the entire oral materials are all translated; the author only feels the level of translation equivalence in some of the utterances is grossly inadequate thereby leaving them in the original form. This accounts for the presence of untranslatable words and even full statements of indigenous languages in Nigerian literature in English. In all examples given here, the central issue is equivalence which is actually almost unattainable.

In line with the findings, culture and context are essential to any translation enterprise. It is hoped that this study will provide insight into the linguistic translation process for the elucidation of linguistic theory. The study reveals that authentic or complete equivalence in translation which seeks to preserve all of the information in the text while preserving it in good form is a mirage. The present analysis also reveals the fact that the theory of linguistic relativism is much more plausible than that of linguistic universals in the realm of translation in view of the many errors, omissions, and inventions in the translations rendered in these texts. These difficulties evident in not being able to achieve semantic, stylistic and even pragmatic equivalences in the literary translation of the texts clearly equally confirms this point. The present study holds serious implication for translation studies and translation. What is more, it holds serious implication for language teaching in bilingual communities and more specifically for the teaching of English and Yoruba at advanced levels.

The foregoing reveals that translation is no easy task. The study no doubt addresses two important levels of translation, namely the stylistic and pragmatic levels. On stylistics, the literal approach to translation is evidently inadequate as espoused with the present data. Literal translation has no respect for the source language's grammar and style. Literal translation makes a translated text lose the creativity evident in the original text. In short, literal translation will not bring out the functional equivalence of source text into the target text. Thus, literal translation is not a choice of style. Again, literal translation results into idiomatic and foreignized text/expressions.

The current study equally reveals the cultural difference between Yoruba and English. Although a translator is necessarily bilingual, that does not imply that he is bicultural. Meanwhile, unless he is, his translation will fall short of the mark. What appears to the layman as translation at best to the expert is transliteration. Once again, we

note that if translation is not correctly done, meaning is affected. Meanwhile, the essence of communicating is to pass message/meaning across to the hearers/readers. Thus, wrong translation or literal translation is a distortion of meaning. An assessment of the teaching of translation in Nigerian Universities shows that emphasis is placed more on practice than on the theory. This study is an eye opener on the need to be fully engaged in the theory and practice of the act of translation.

On the Pragmatics, this study provides a clear vision of how Pragmatics relates to translation and, in particular, of how translation equivalence is more of a matter of pragmatic equivalence. It is therefore recommended that every student of translation should be made to pass through a course in the pragmatics of translation. This is supposed to take care of cultural relativity that makes meaning transfer between two languages difficult. After all, meaning transference is done between languages in a number of ways: through intonation, use of illocutionary particles, sequential focus, etc. Thus, a translator must necessarily seek for equivalent pragmatic effect in the target language in order to construct a new text with its own world view, with its relations and with other sets of worlds.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

|      |                    |       |                        |
|------|--------------------|-------|------------------------|
| ANPH | Anaphor            | PERF  | Perfective             |
| COMP | Complementizer     | PROG  | Progressive            |
| DEM  | Demonstrative      | PRVB  | Preverb                |
| FOC  | Focus              | QUANT | Quantifier             |
| HTS  | High tone syllable | REL   | Relative marker        |
| MOD  | Modal              | RESP  | Resumptive             |
| NEG  | Negator            | 1SG   | First person singular  |
| PART | Particle           | 2PL   | Second person singular |

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