

PROBLEMS OF FRENCH-IGBO PROSE TRANSLATION: VINCENT OKEKE AND HIS IGBO TRANSLATORS

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Abstract

Literature continues to play an undeniable role in modern societies. A national literature becomes an international literature when its readership transcends national boundaries. Consequently, many African writers choose international languages like English, French, German or Arabic as their languages of expression of African culture. However, a few African writers concerned about the development of indigenous African languages use indigenous African languages as their languages of expression knowing fully well that such works will have a limited readership and may never be recognized at the international scene. It is noteworthy that translated literature often forms the literary compendium of English, French, German Arabic and other international languages. Achebe and Soyinka are read by Francophones while Oyono and Bâ are read by Anglophones through the efforts of literary translators. Furthermore, through literary translators' efforts Igbo readers can read the French Author Molière while French readers can read the Igbo author, Nwana. This study sets out to evaluate the problems encountered in translating Okeke's French novel *Le Syndrome 419: Le Frère Terrible* (2001), into Igbo as *Mpu 419: Nwanne Omekome*

Keywords: Prose, Okeke, French, Igbo, translation, problems

Introduction

Interpretation and translation have continued to ensure intercultural communication among speakers of different languages. Whereas interpreting takes care of oral communication, translation takes care of written communication. Our study focuses on translation as it seeks to make available to Igbo readers the wisdom and knowledge embedded in Okeke's *Le Syndrome 419: Le Frère Terrible*. Although one often hears the assertion that translators are traitors, translators continue to serve as intercultural bridges that permit readers to have access to materials written originally in foreign languages. Multilingualism is a linguistic feature of pre-colonial and post-colonial Africa. The argument on whether African literature should be written in African languages or non-African languages remains inconclusive. Nevertheless, literary practice in Africa is currently a multilingual activity as literature in foreign languages exists side by side with literature in indigenous African languages.

Nigerian literature is expressed in foreign and indigenous Nigerian languages. Nigerian literature written in English language occupies an

enviable position in world literature because Nigerian authors like Achebe who wrote originally in English language are read extensively. Through literary translation, these Nigerian authors are equally read in other languages of the world such as French, German and Arabic. It is pertinent to point out that Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has been translated into Igbo language by Nwankwo (2008). Literary translation involves to a large extent literary appreciation or interpretation and literary re-creativity from a source language to a target language. According to Simpson (2007:238) "in literary translation, we have the case of a creator only a step removed from the original author".

Furthermore, Ajunwa (2014:30) notes that "translation could be viewed at one or more levels. The first level is that in which the translator is translating directly from the source language (SL1) into a target language (TL1)". Therefore, the translation of Okeke's *Le Syndrome 419: Le Frère Terrible*, from French (SL1) into Igbo (TL1) as *Mpu 419: Nwanne Omekome*, represents the first level translation. Our discussion hereafter will be limited to this first level translation as it relates to reproducing

in, Okeke's original prosaic message written in French.

Synopsis of Okeke's *Le Syndrome 419: Le Frère Terrible* / *Mpụ 419: Nwanne Omekome*

Le Syndrome 419: Le Frère Terrible, is a fiction written in French by Vincent Onyema Okeke in 2001. As the title indicates, drawing from the notorious and Nigerian christened '419' crime, Okeke uses the experience of two naive and poor Black Students in France, who become victims of indiscriminate acceptance of a Blackman who pretends to be a student in France, but turns out to be an international criminal; to warn humanity on the dangers of human relations based on outward appearances like colour of skin rather than on proven character and integrity. To share Okeke's message and literary ingenuity with Igbo readers, Ihechi Nkoro, Livinus Eke and Emeka Iwunze translated *Le Syndrome 419: Le Frère Terrible* into Igbo as *Mpụ 419: Nwanne Omekome* (2017).

Methodology

The theoretical framework for the translation is a synthesis of Sociolinguistic theory of translation as represented in Nida's communicative theory of translation (Nida, 1991). Our method of study will be comparative and analytical as we would seek to highlight the problems encountered in our attempt to reproduce in the Igbo version, the original message of *Le Syndrome 419: Le Frère Terrible*.

Problems Encountered in Translating *Le Syndrome 419: Le frère Terrible* into Igbo

House (2009:79) points out that globalization resembles traditional translation processes in that in order to make one product available to many people, it becomes necessary to 'localize it' by translating it." Hence, translating, in seeking to localize, entails numerous linguistic and socio-cultural problems. Writing on translation and world literature, Damrosch (2012:411-412) underscores "irreducible problems that translation always faces, however simple the text in question, however uncomplicated the history of its transmission and

reception". Reflecting on the translation problems of developing countries, Simpson (2007:315) emphasizes the need for Africa to increase its translation research so as to understand better the symbiotic relationship between translation and stylistics as well as contribute to the virgin field of scientific endeavour. Our present study is part of our response to Simpson's call. Furthermore, Timothy-Asobele (2016: 184), in his recent study on translation studies in Africa, opines that "every translator is plagued by this problem of reconciling accuracy with readability." In addition, Eddin (2017:1) opines that since "translation is by no means only a linguistic process, culture stands as a stumbling block to a smooth process of translation." In what follows, we shall highlight the problems encountered in translating Okeke's novel under study into Igbo. The problems are categorized as linguistic, sociocultural and technological.

A) Linguistic Problems

Firstly, in this study, linguistic problems refer to instances that involve choosing one lexical item in preference to another in an attempt to reproduce the message of the source text in the target text. Such instances include synonymy, orthography, foreignization or indigenization of loan words. Secondly, paucity of lexicographic tools in Igbo language constitutes another aspect of linguistic problems encountered in translating the French text into Igbo.

i) Synonymy

Synonymy is one of the commonest sense relations in human languages and could involve a lexical item or a sentence. Where synonyms are context-determined, synonymy may not constitute a problem to the translator. Nevertheless, in translating *Le Syndrome 419: Le frère terrible* into Igbo, the translators had difficulties in choosing between the Igbo banking synonyms 'uloakụ and obaego' whose French equivalent is 'banque' and English equivalent is 'bank.'

Examples

S/NO	<i>Le Syndrome 419...</i>	Mpu 419`	English Equivalent
1	Banque= pp.17, 30, 31	uloaku / obaego =pp.17, 32, 33	Bank

ii) Orthography

The studies of Emenanjo (1986, 2016), Mbah (2003) and Agbedo (2009) point out the inconsistencies in Igbo orthography standardization efforts made. It is noteworthy that at the time of the translation of the French novel under study into Igbo, 2017, orthographic inconsistencies abound in current Igbo literature.

For instance, the Igbo expressions ‘o buła / ‘obuła’ (each, every) and ‘ma o bu’ / ‘maobu’ are instances of orthographic inconsistencies in current Igbo literature. The translators consider *Le Syndrome 419: Le frère Terrible* consider ‘o buła as two words and ‘ma o bu’ as three words as seen in Eme (2015:5), Emenanjo (2015:179-180) and Onukawa (2017:8, 19),

Examples

S/NO	<i>Le Syndrome 419...</i>	Mpu 419`	English Equivalent
1	p.vi = ...frère ou soeur	p.viii =... nwanna ma o bu nwanne	Brother or sister.
2	p.vi =...pour autant qu'on veule se...	Vii= ma o buru na mmadu chorọ ka...	If someone wants to...
3	vii= où l'on peut tutoyer	p.viii = ... na ya mara onye ahu ma o bu na o nwere ihe jikoro ha.	..that he / she knows the person or that there is a relationship between them
4	p.1= ou, tout le monde,	p.xiii= ma o bu, onye o buła	Or, whoever
5	p.2 = ...ou bien	p.xiv=ma o bu	Or
6	p.3= ...du café, du thé ou du chocolat...	p.1=... kofi, tii ka o bu chokoleeti...?	Coffee, tea, or chocolate...?
7	p.3 = ... quand il s'agit de boisson chaude....	p.2 = mgbe o buła	Whenever
8	p.5= vrai ou faux	p.4= ma o bu eziokwu ma o bughi	Whether it is true or false

iii) English and Loan words in the source Text

Literary creativity, such as the writing of prose, involves the use of many stylistic devices that vary from author to author. One of the significant literary devices seen in Okeke's novel *Le Syndrome 419: Le Frère Terrible* is the use of English words that also exist in French. Such English loan words in the source text are retained in the Igbo version by the translators so as to recreate in the target text the stylistic effect in the source text.

Examples

S/NO	<i>Le Syndrome 419...</i>	Mpu 419`
1	Pp.3-4 =O yes... Date of birth: 13 January 1950	p.2 = O yes... Date of birth: 13 January 1950
3	p.3 =Dr. Chris Jameson, Economist,	p.2= Dr. Chris Jameson, Ikonomisti,
4	p.3 = Date of birth: 13 January 1950	p.2=Date of birth: 13 January 1950
5	p.3= O yes	p.2= Oh yes,

iv) Choosing between Indigenous and Popular Loan words

Languages in contact affect each other in diverse ways. English language has been in contact with Igbo language for centuries not on the same official pedestal but on an enviable supreme official status that has not encouraged the growth and development of Igbo language and other indigenous languages. Indeed, even when efforts have been made by Igbo scholars to create indigenous terms to convey the meaning of certain concepts that first came into Igbo lexicon as loan words, many Igbo speakers prefer to use the older loan words thereby popularizing English language more than Igbo language. For instance, the Igbo banking terms, 'uloaku and obaego', are currently in use as well as the English equivalent of those terms 'bank'. Since the Igbo terms 'uloaku and obaego' are natural and dynamic equivalents of the English banking term 'bank', the translators think that they are better options than the English term 'bank' to encourage indigenization of terms which

contribute immensely to development of indigenous languages. Between the two synonyms 'uloaku and obaego', 'obaego', which appears to be more popular than 'uloaku', is preferred by the translators.

v) Foreignization or Indigenization of loan words

Whereas Igbo words naturally fit into the phonological system of the language characterized essentially by the VCV and CCV syllabic structure as in words like 'Nku' (wing), Mgbọ (bullet), onu (mouth) and imi (nose), English and French loan words do not. It has been observed that in current Igbo literature, there is a growing attempt to naturalize or indigenize loan words to fit into the syllabic structure of the language as seen in Chinagorom (2013:12), Eme (2015:2) and Onukawa (2017:33). In translating the French text into Igbo, the translators adopted the naturalization or indigenization of all loanwords in accordance with Igbo syllabic system.

Examples

S/NO	<i>Le Syndrome 419...</i>	Mpu 419`	English Equivalent
1	French, p.	Frenchi, p. v	French
2	Anglais, p.	Nglishi, p. iv	English
3	Republique, p.	Ripobiliki, p.v	Republic

4	Chef, Aristocrates?, p.	Chiifu, p.xiv	Chief
5	Directeur, p.	Dairekito, p.xiv	Director

iv) Paucity of Lexicographic Tools

Given that translation is both an activity and a product because every translation exercise ends in the production of a written message from a source language to a target language, translators often use written documents as great resources or tools. Monolingual, bilingual and multilingual dictionaries are some of the traditional documents used by translators. Our French-Igbo prose translation indicates that whereas monolingual and bilingual dictionaries abound in French, the translators' search for an Igbo monolingual dictionary was fruitless as the translators are not yet aware of the existence of any Igbo monolingual dictionary. With regards to bilingual dictionaries that include Igbo language, the situation is more encouraging as Ugochukwu and Okafor's Igbo-French dictionary titled *Dictionnaire igbo-français suivi d'un index igbo-français* (2004), helped the translators a lot. *Le Nouveau Petit Robert* (2008) is one of the monolingual French dictionaries used by the translators. The translators also used *Cassell's French-English / English-French Dictionary* (1982).

B) Sociocultural problems

The study considers content or meaning-related problems as cases where there is no one to one correspondence in meaning of a lexical item in passing from French, the source language to Igbo, the target language. Though French and Igbo are not genetically related, cases of equivalent lexical items exist between the two languages as shown in Nkoro (2015), where Jacques Prévert's French poem "Le Cancre" is

translated directly into Igbo as 'Iti', because both the French noun 'Le Cancre' and the Igbo noun 'iti', which mean 'a duns' in English; are natural equivalents. However, in translating Okeke's *Le Syndrome 419: Le frère terrible*, into Igbo as *Mpu 419: Nwanne Omekome*, the translators encountered some content or meaning-related problems due to synonymy and sociocultural factors.

Firstly, the French noun frère which occurs in the title and which is used extensively in the novel posed a semantic problem to the translators because of sociocultural factors. The French nuclear family system uses brother for members of the same nuclear family whereas in the Igbo extended family system, 'frère', that is, 'brother' can run from the family through a clan or community to a race, making room for French 'frère' or English 'brother' to mean 'nwanne' (close relation) or 'nwanna' (distant relation). Hence, denotatively, the Igbo equivalent for the French noun 'frère' is 'nwanna' but contextually, the French noun 'frère' could also mean 'nwanne' in Igbo to connote a closer family relationship. Consequently, the Igbo translators chose 'nwanne' as the contextual equivalent of the French noun 'frère' as used in the French title, to connote the unconditional acceptance of a purported Black student in France who turned out to be an international criminal, by two other naïve Black students in France. To the two naïve Black students, their common skin colour represent a close family tie. Secondly, adjectives of colour constituted a problem to the translators as the French and the Igbo paradigms for colour representations are different.

Examples:

S/NO	<i>Le Syndrome 419...</i>	<i>Mpu 419'</i>	English Equivalent
1	Frère = p. iv, vi, vii, viii, p.1, p.2 Title	Nwanne Title	Relation, sister, brother
2	p.62 = Le métro	p.66= Metro	Underground, subway

3	p.20= Boulevard St. Michel	p.21= Boulevard St. Michel	St Michael Boulevard Michel
4	p.10 = à la Saviem	La Saviem p.10	La Saviem
5	P.55= l'Ecole Nationale d'Administration (E.N.A)	p.58=l'Ecole Nationale d'Administration (E.N.A)	The Ecole Nationale d'Administration (E.N.A) (Nwizu 2016 :97)
7	P.59= Renault 12 bleu-clair , Chez Maximes	p.62= Renault 12 na-acha eluigwe eluigwe, Chez Maximes	A blue Renault 12
8	Bar-tabac, p.70	p.75= ebe a na-ere mmanya na kofị	Pub
9	L'hiver, p.1	p.xiii =winta	Winter
	p.89=des voyageurs-chèques en bois=	p.94 = cheeki njem adigboroja	Dud voyageurs-cheques
10	p.36 =Le printemps	p.38 = Springi	Spring
11	p.6 = studio	p.5= studio	Studio

C) Dearth of Translator's Tools & Technological Problems

The impact of Information and Computer Technology (ICT) in all 21st Century human activities including translation practice is undeniable. Digital speed enjoyed when typing an English text using an English keyboard is quite relaxing and the output very enormous. On the contrary, speed and productivity decrease when an English keyboard is used to type an Igbo text because most of the Igbo alphabets are not represented on the English keyboard. Non-availability of an Igbo keyboard was the greatest technological problem encountered by the translators. Although symbols in the English Keyboard were used, the process of locating and inserting the symbols to get correctly written Igbo words was quite time-wasting and cumbersome. Again, e-dictionaries which are readily available on internet for English and French are not available in Igbo which made the translators' attempt to produce an equivalent text in Igbo less

digital and very tasking. It is noteworthy that whereas the French online dictionary *Le Grand Dictionnaire Hachette-Oxford - Français-anglais, anglais-français*. (2009).

<https://www.cultura.com/le-grand-dictionnaire-hachette-oxford-9782012814189.html> was used by the translators, no online dictionary could be found for Igbo language. The magnitude of ICT-related problems encountered by the translators in seeking to produce an Igbo text equivalent to the original French text, underscores the call by Makinde and Tom-Lawyer (2016: 646) for the development of tools that will ensure the use of all Nigerian languages in ICT, and according to Ogunkeye (2006:76), put Igbo and other Nigerian languages 'on the global market'.

Conclusion

Many indigenous and non-indigenous languages are in contact in Nigeria. French and Igbo represent the category of an indigenous Nigerian language and a foreign language being

in contact. In Nigeria, communication in Igbo and French has several dimensions including literary translation. Literary translation is a veritable means of intercultural communication between the French literary world and the Igbo literary world. Our study focused on problems of French-Igbo prose translation. Data for the study were drawn from Vincent Okeke's French Novel *Le syndrome 419: Le frère terrible* (2001) and its Igbo version *Mpu 419: Nwanne Omekome*, translated by Nkoro, Eke and Iwunze (2017). The study which adopted the communicative approach to translation shows that the translators encountered linguistic, sociocultural and technological problems. An attempt was made to solve the linguistic problems through structural

adaptations to the target language while the sociocultural problems were solved through the use of loan words and sociocultural adaptations to the target audience. However, we think that orthographic representations of loan words in current Igbo literature need to be investigated further by Igbo scholars. With regards to technological problems, we are of the opinion that since prose translation into Igbo language is a written communication, that an interdisciplinary research that will make Igbo keyboards as readily available in Nigeria as the English keyboard would enhance translation activities that involve Igbo and other languages of the world.

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