

Sociocultural Considerations and the Challenges of Literary Translation: The Case of *L'Aventure Ambiguë* Into *The Ambiguous Adventure*

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Abstract

L'Aventure ambiguë written by Cheikh Hamidou Kane was translated into English titled *The Ambiguous Adventure* by Katherine Woods. This translation reveals the importance of sociocultural tendencies in the translation of literary works. The Senegalese society is the plot of this novel and Kane embedded several sociocultural elements in the source language to convey his message. In this paper, based on Nida's sociolinguistic theory, we analyze the sociocultural considerations and the stakes in the translation of Kane's *The Ambiguous Adventure*. The study shows that sociocultural elements can pose problems to the translator in spite of the undeniable quality of her translation. It is evident that Katherine Woods has to deal with different types of proverbs, idioms and metaphors as used by Kane to show her artistic prowess and knowledge of the vast history of the people.

Key Words: Translation, sociocultural, literary, sociolinguistic, theory

Résumé

L'Aventure ambiguë écrit par Cheikh Hamidou Kane a été traduit en anglais intitulé *The Ambiguous Adventure* par Katherine Woods. Cette traduction révèle l'importance des tendances socioculturelles dans la traduction des œuvres littéraires. La société sénégalaise sert d'intrigue à ce roman et Kane a intégré plusieurs éléments socioculturels de la langue source pour transmettre son message. Dans cet article basé sur la théorie sociolinguistique de Nida, nous analysons les tendances socioculturelles et ces enjeux de la traduction de *L'Aventure ambiguë* de Kane. L'étude révèle que les éléments socioculturels peuvent poser des problèmes à la traductrice malgré la qualité indéniable de sa traduction. Il est évident que Katherine Woods doit faire face aux enjeux de différents types de proverbes, d'idiomes et de métaphores utilisés par Kane pour montrer ses prouesses artistiques et sa connaissance de la langue et l'histoire du peuple.

Mots clés : Traduction, socioculturel, littéraire, sociolinguistique, théorie

Introduction

Every society in the world has its uniqueness pruned basically from culture and leading to harmonized behavioral relationship among the people. Societies cannot be separated from culture and it justifies why Newmark cited by Baker affirms that culture is "a way of life and its manifestations is peculiar to any community that uses a particular language as its means of expression" (304). This shows evidently that apart from culture, language also play an important role in a society. Culture and language are however, stringently connected in such that each language reflect on its own peculiar cultural features. All languages have their specific structures which is determined by the view of the speaker of the language (Baker, 315). Utah and Nwosu opines that 'la langue joue un rôle clé dans la traduction

étant donné que c'est à travers la langue que la traduction s'exprime' (60). This means that languages have a consequential impact on culture and if the culture of the source language (SL) is not same as that of the target language (TL), it would affect the use of word or the manner in which statements are being transmitted. Transmitted messages are not only in oral forms but also in written forms like in literature. In literature, authors write basically to mirror the society via a source language and can be translated from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). According to Nida, "any idea that can be expressed in one language can also be expressed in another language unless the form itself is an integral part of the message" (339). This indicates that culture, which is an integral part and composite of a society can be translated via language for better

understanding of all since society since and culture are the hallmark for effective existence. The paper examines critically the sociocultural considerations and challenges of literary translation in Woods' English translation of the novel of this study originally written by Cheik Hamidou Kane on the basis of sociolinguistic theory. This is basically to ascertain the adequacy of Woods' translation of sociocultural constituents in the source text considering her foreign background.

The sociolinguistic approach

For sociolinguistics such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Noam Chomsky, Roman Jakobson and Edward Sapir as well as Baylon and Fabre, the understanding of a statement goes beyond the linguistic framework and encompasses social factors (72). Baylon and Fabre posit that "sociolinguist bring his attention to the speaker as a member of a community, as a subject whose language can characterize ethnicity, occupation, standard of living, class membership, etc. (74). This implies that the essential difference between linguistics and sociolinguistics stems from the fact that the first is a science of language, while the second deals with the relations between linguistic and social phenomena. According to Pergnier There are different sociolinguistic approaches to translation (41). In Nida's model, methods and approaches from sociolinguists is considered relevant in translation because sociolinguists offer tools for interpretation and translation which enables scholars to analyse texts as communicative entities. However, for the purpose of this study, we shall adopt Eugene Nida's theory for analysis putting into consideration the use of language in social and cultural context as regarding translation. This shall be done basically through textual analysis.

Methodology adopted: Textual analysis

The paper adopts textual analysis as method for data analysis. Textual analysis is a methodology that involves understanding language, symbols, and/or pictures present in texts to gain information regarding how people make sense of and communicate life and life experiences (Fallery and Rodhain 11). Visual, written, or spoken messages provide cues to ways through which communication may be understood. Often

the messages are understood as influenced by and reflective of larger social structures. For example, messages reflect and/or may challenge historical, cultural, political, ethical contexts for which they exist. Therefore, the analyst must understand the broader social structures that influence the messages present in the text under investigation. The methodology of textual analysis has been used since the 1960s on literary texts by sociolinguist such as Pierre Guiraud, Charles Muller, Etienne Brunet and more recently Jean-Marie Viprey, Véronique Magri-Mourgues Michel Bernard (Fallery and Rodhain 11). These sociolinguists critically analyse literary texts via this method to describe the content, structure and function of the message contained in a text. To achieve their objectives, important considerations were made in the process which include selecting the types of texts to be studied, acquiring appropriate texts, and determining which particular approach to employ in analyzing them (Frey, Botan & Kreps 26). Putting this idea into consideration, this paper considers textual methodology for analysis.

Primary and Secondary sources of textual data

The primary source of textual data for this paper is the literary text *L'Aventure ambiguë* of Cheikh Hamidou Kane and its translated version by Woods. The first reading was done in a detailed way around this novel and its translated version in order to define its thematic content, phrasing structure, background and form as well as the visions of the author. However, the secondary data is gotten from literature works of critics such as Zuzana Rakova's, Oseki-Dépré's Inês, Michaël Oustinoff' etc. The paper adopts some procedures of translation by Vinay and Darbelnet.

The challenges of translating cultural elements in *L'Aventure ambiguë*

The translation of socio-cultural elements in literary translation could be difficult for a translator because translation activity doesn't only focus on linguistic elements but also it focuses on cultural elements of a language. In working towards achieving faithfulness in her, Woods considered with much relevance, the culture that describes the source language as well as that of the target language. In the translation of *L'Aventure ambiguë* into *The Ambiguous Adventure*, Katherine Woods has had to deal with socio-

cultural and historical phenomena. Let's see this

example from our texts:

S/N	French	English
1	« ...du flot de chair, de sang et d'histoire... » (175)	“...the stream of flesh, blood and history...”(162)

In Example 1 above, the use of imagery of historical events is observed through some sort of personification. In considering sociocultural heritage through history, the translator made an allegorically portrayal of the message of the source text which is also accepted in the target language. In examining critically her choice of words in her translation, it was noticed that the translator replaces the cliché "... du flot de chair, de sang et d'histoire" which means "of the stream of flesh,

blood and history ..." by its right cultural equivalent in the target language. However, different choice of words could be used when translating same expression "...du flot de chair, de sang et d'histoire ..." is translated into another language in its rightful socio-cultural context by putting into cognizance its right sociocultural context.

Let's examine this excerpt from both texts:

SN	French	English
2	Le matin de l'Occident en Afrique noire fut constellé de sourires, de coups de canon et de verroteries brillantes. Ceux qui n'avaient point d'histoire rencontraient ceux qui portaient le monde sur leurs épaules. Ce fut un matin de gésine. Le monde connu s'enrichissait d'une naissance qui se fit dans la boue et dans le sang. De saisissement, les uns ne combattirent pas. Ils étaient sans passé, donc sans souvenir. Ceux qui débarquaient étaient Blancs et frénétiques. On avait rien connu de semblable. (59-60).	The morning of the Occident in black Africa was spangled over with smiles, with cannon shots, with shining glass beads. Those who had no history were encountering those who carried the world on their shoulders. It was a morning of accouchement: The known world was enriching itself by a birth that took place in mire and blood. From shock, the one side made no resistance. They were a people without a past, therefore without memory. The men who were landing on their shores were white, and mad. Nothing like them had ever been known. (48-49)

Here, Kane systematically presents the Senegalese socio-cultural situation with this brief description through the source language. In this example, Woods also succinctly captures the Senegalese society before and after the intrusion of the whites as portrayed by Kane. In this context, some dictions were used to portray the relationship between Africans and Europeans during the colonial era. Words like: « Ceux qui n'avaient point d'histoire rencontraient ceux qui portaient le monde sur leurs épaules » translated as « Those who had no history were encountering those who carried the world on their shoulders ». In this translation : « portait le monde sur leurs épaules » portray a suppressive or dominating image of colonialisme in Africa. Socioculturally, this

expression by Kane gives the true picture of colonialisme in Africa. This problem of class identified in the Senegalese society today emanated from colonialisme. However, in portrayal of exploitation, Kane depicts the rich socio-cultural heritage of Africa and made it look attractive through the involvement of the antiquity of craft: “Le monde connu s'enrichissait d'une naissance qui se fit dans la boue et dans le sang » « The known world was enriching itself by a birth that took place in mire and blood. Wood used the following equivalent:

- portaient le monde – carry the world
- le monde connu - The known world
- s'enrichissait - enriching itself
- in mire and blood - la boue et dans le sang

In *L'Aventure ambiguë*, Kane's portrays a great talent in his use of metaphorical expressions to show the cultural value of his people as shown in the above exemple. In considering the above choice of words in the sociocultural context, one discovers that Kane used these metaphoric linguistic elements to depict deplorable state of Africa from colonization. Wood on her part, followed Kane closely in her translation to depict same equivalent so as to remain faithful. Woods must have taken cognizance cautions of these metaphorical tendencies in the English version. This is due to the fact that these expressions could

be of great challenge to an inexperienced translator who risks giving a faulty or inadequate translation and misleading the reader in his translation if the culture of the target language is not understood. To succeed in the translation of *L'Aventure ambiguë* from French into English, Woods resorts to the interpretation of metaphorical sense to remain faithful to the original text. Going by the analysis, this reason is perhaps because expressions from the source language is equivalently translated into the target language through metaphoric expressions.

The following examples serve as illustrations as a metaphor-container translation:

SN	Français	English
3	Mais il n'y éprouvait pas cependant cette plénitude du foyer . (49).	But nevertheless, he did not experience that plenitude of the spirit he had felt at the hearth . (39).
4	Le maître se figea , et par la pensée, avec le chef, répéta peut-être pour la millionième fois de sa vie la grande profession de foi. (41).	The teacher settles himself in his place and in thought, repeated with the chief, perhaps for the millionth time, the great profession of faith. (31).

Woods enunciated Kane's stylistic implicit throughout her translation. In the first example (3), "plenitude du foyer" is the metaphor-container. She returns it by "plenitude of the spirit he had felt at the hearth". The idea of the state of mind "spirit" is added to make the meaning clear and to consider what is acceptable in the language and culture of the target text. This process is considered according to Nida as communicative and semantic translation due to the fact that the translation is followed by meaning and sociolinguistic consideration. The extract in the above example demonstrate Nida's model of dealing with "the transformation of metaphor into meaning" (Rodhain & Fallery 23). Here, the metaphor of the source text is transformed into literal meaning in the target text with precision, which shows the good quality of Woods' translation.

example 4, is transformed into literal meaning "The teacher settled himself in his place" by Wood. The petrified image of the master lacks a precision in the source text. Its transformation in literal sense in the target text has given a precision that the master does not settle anywhere but that he settles in the place that has been reserved for him, for example, his seat. This translation is a kind of synthetic modulation where the notion of the source text is about a dilution in the target text that result in the gain. This is because Wood wants to make the translation effective as possible considering their equivalent. Although Wood was careful enough not to waste the semantic meaning of the source text. On the other hand, we noticed that "of his life" is not translated deliberately in the English version because there isn't any semantic value of lost words.

The allegorical image in "Le maître **se figea**" in

Consider further examples:

SN	Français	English
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5	Alentour, le carrelage étendait son miroir brillant où résonnait le claquement des souliers ». (101).	Around me, the stone floor was spread out like a brilliant mirror of sound that echoed the clattering of men’s shoes. (89).
6	Ses yeux étaient implorants, sa voix mourante, son petit corps était moitié de fièvre , son cœur battait follement. (14).	His eyes were imploring, his voice was fading away, his little body was burning with fever , his heart was beating wildly. (10).

First, the word "Alentour" in the source text in Example 5 is translated as "Around Me", which we consider to be clearer in the English version. We can also see the anthropomorphic image embedded in the active voice "Le carrelage étendait son miroir brillant " which is rendered by the passive voice as "the stone floor was spread out like a brilliant mirror". Also, in the English version, there is the use of syntactical comparison where the imperfect verb "étendait" meaning "resonated" was translated to "sound."

Another important aspect is the translation of "résonnait le claquement des souliers" into "the clattering of men's shoes. Here, Woods specifies the sexual gender of shoe users in English. This example highlights the nature of syntactic structures in translation. Going by Nida's view, it can thus be said that metaphorical ideas are always respected to produce adequate semantic translation. This process could sometimes be taxing but the translator is perhaps obliged to get an equivalent of the source text to stay faithful to the Author. This act is a justification of Nida's view that says "any idea that can be expressed in one language can also be expressed in another language" (93)

In example 6, some changes were observed in the source text in relation to the target text. In the source text "sa voix mourante, son petit corps était moitié de fièvre" is translated as "his voice was fading away" and "burning with fever. Thus, "mourante" meaning "dying" in English is an adjective and "moitié" meaning "moist" is an attribute. They were translated with "was fading away" and "was burning" in English with imperfect verbs. This shows the technicalities adopted by Woods to overcome the sociocultural challenges of translating *L'Aventure ambiguë* of Cheikh Hamidou Kane into *The Ambiguous Adventure*.

More often, cultural challenges are surmounted through semantics in translation. Woods adopted this procedure to overcome the obstacle of translation cultural clichés. For example, Wood translates *Le comble de l'orgueil*. (27) as *The pacle of pride* (17) Instead of "the height of pride" that one would ordinarily assume it should be. Here, Wood focused on the semantics to produce equal meaning of the message of the source text. However, the use of modulation cannot be neglected since Wood used much of this technics in her translation. For example,

Wood's translation of « Le silence s'était fait parmi les disciples **médusés** (32) » shows her efforts in translating sociocultural clichés. One would have thought that Wood's translation would have been "silence had fallen among the dumfounded disciples" but this was never the case. Here, the translator never used the word "dumfounded" for the translation of the word "**médusé**". Instead, she translated it as "Now there was a silence **among** the disciples". Here, the translator used modulation as a technic to replace dumbfounded with a more suitable expression to reveal his mastery of translation technics. She obviously used modulation to regulate the word of the source text in such a manner that the resulting target text conforms to the natural patterns of the target language. Another example is seen in the translation of

« Mais il n'y éprouvait pas cependant cette **plénitude du foyer** (49) » as "But nevertheless he did not experience that **plenitude of the spirit he had felt at the hearth** (39)".

Here, Wood applied a semantic interpretation in her translation. She focused on meaning rather than being faithful to the source text. One would have thought that the translator

will translate « Mais il n’y éprouvait pas cependant cette plénitude du foyer » as « But he did not yet experience this fullness of home » therefore, “plénitude du foyer” becomes “fullness of home” but she translated it as “plenitude of the spirit he had felt at the hearth”. This shows again that the translator regulates the meaning of the words in the source text to conform to that of the culture of the target text through the technic of modulation.

Conclusion

Sociocultural issues of literary translation have continued to be a challenge to translators. We discovered that most authors write for their target audiences and in the process, they choose the appropriate language and diction to convey their

messages. Some of these words are cultural clichés that pose a great challenge to translators. In *L’aventure ambiguë*, Kane used idioms, proverbs, metaphors and several cultural clichés that seem to be a great challenge for translators. We discovered that the translator, Katherine Wood used technic such as modulation and adaptation to overcome some of these challenges in her translation of the novel. She obviously succeeded in her translation due to her understanding of the history and culture that are reflected in Kane’s novel through research. Her ability to remain faithful to the source text in her translation reveals her competence as a translator.

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