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Towards Functional Translation: Translation of some Yoruba Proverbs

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Abstract: *The case of culture, language and proverb is like the junction where three paths meet. Language is an integral part of a people's culture in one hand, and proverb is an essential facet of any given language. In some cases, understanding a people's perception on issues becomes a problem because of the inability to decode the cultural background of such people. Inadequacy in the comprehension of people's cultural context is capable of bringing misinterpretation or misrepresentation. This study, therefore, examines thirty Yoruba proverbs; translated into English and French to demonstrate how proverbs can be used in conflict resolution, give instructions or warnings and encouragement in taking well-informed actions among other things. The study aimed at educating people about the Yoruba people's world view as regards certain issues and actions. Field Study is the methodology adopted for the research while Functionalist theory of translation serves as the theoretical framework on which the study is premised. This theory investigates the nature of translation as a communicative action which should take into account cultural context. Findings revealed that proverbs permit people to communicate, learn as well as allowing them to express feelings for their material and non-material needs. It is equally established that some proverbs have the capacity to provide solutions to societal problems. The paper concludes that understanding people's culture is important because it explains how culture defines and shapes their actions. The application of functionalist theory to translation will help to achieve a better translation which considers cultural and linguistic properties all together.*
Keywords : *Functional translation, Yoruba proverbs, Culture, Language, Communicative action.*
Résumé : *La culture, la langue et le proverbe est comme la jonction où trois chemins se rencontrent. La langue fait partie intégrante de la culture d'un peuple d'une part, et le proverbe est une facette essentielle de toute langue donnée. Dans certains cas, la compréhension de la perception d'un peuple sur les questions qui concernent les trois concepts devient un problème en raison de l'incapacité à décoder le contexte culturel de ces personnes. Le manque de la compréhension du contexte culturel des gens est susceptible d'entraîner une mauvaise interprétation ou une fausse représentation. Cette étude examine donc ; trente proverbes d'origine yoruba ; traduit en anglais et en français pour nous montrer comment les proverbes peuvent être utilisés dans la résolution de conflits, donner des instructions ou des avertissements et des encouragements à prendre des mesures éclairées, entre autres. L'étude vise à éduquer les gens sur la vision du monde du peuple Yoruba en ce qui concerne certaines questions et actions. L'étude adopte la documentation comme méthodologie pour la recherche tandis que la théorie fonctionnaliste de la traduction*

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sert de cadre théorique sur lequel l'étude est fondée. Cette théorie étudie la nature de la traduction en tant qu'action communicative qui doit tenir compte du contexte culturel. Les résultats révèlent que les proverbes permettent aux gens de communiquer, d'apprendre ainsi que d'exprimer des sentiments pour leurs besoins matériels et non matériels. Il est également établi que certains proverbes ont la capacité d'apporter des solutions aux problèmes dans la société. L'article conclut que la compréhension de la culture des gens est importante car elle explique comment la culture définit et façonne leurs actions. L'application de la théorie fonctionnaliste à la traduction aidera à parvenir à une meilleure traduction qui tient compte des propriétés culturelles et linguistiques.

Mots clés *: Traduction fonctionnelle, proverbs d'origine Yoruba, la culture, la langue, action communicative.*

1. Introduction

Translation is an art of communicating messages across languages to resolve cultural and linguistic barriers. One of the major uses of translation is to reduce tension, misunderstanding and hostility among different peoples of the world. The need for translators or interpreters is to bridge the gaps between different languages and cultures and to provide international understanding (Kolawole, 2013: 513). Enani (1999) defines translation as "a modern science at the interface of philosophy, linguistics, psychology and sociology." However, whether as an art or a science, translation is a human activity that allows people around the world to exchange ideas, thoughts, experiences, imaginations and feelings irrespective of their cultural differences.

When the activity of transferring messages from one language A (source language) to another language B (target language) is in written form, it is called translation while the oral form is described as interpretation. It is not the words that are translated or interpreted; it is the message (sense or meaning) which is contained in the words. For anyone to translate or interpret effectively, an adequate knowledge of a given language and its cultural knowledge are required.

This study is guided by the fact that the issue of identity should be taken seriously in the 21st century and time to come. Identity is a complex phenomenon. As identity is often contested, people, therefore, need to orientate and re-orientate and re-inform to define self and shape decisions and actions. Garba (2010: 53) opines:

> Identity, generally, could be linked to a quest: the search for a loose, ambiguous point of transcendence and metaphysical permanence. Therefore, one's affirmation and confirmation of a specific identity constitutes an image of the self as it is interspersed with others. But since the affirmed identity is almost always contested, identity has to be constantly redefined and re-imagined with dire consequence for the stability of the self or of a polity, as the history of the twentieth century has powerfully attested.

One cannot talk about proverbs without referencing the word culture and language. They are symbolically representations of our existence. Culture constitutes what we do and how we do them. It is indeed the determinant of our behavior and actions. It defines our world view, assessment of issues and responses to such matters.

Proverb is an aspect of a given language both in oral and in written forms. Language is a tool of communication through which ideas, experiences, beliefs, imaginations, observations and feelings are shared among people of a linguistic community, with the use of certain symbols. The linguistic community in this context may not necessarily be a small community. Some languages are spoken in different parts of the world as a result of many reasons such as socioeconomic migration, war, slave trade and globalization. A language may be acquired as one's mother tongue (L 1), learnt as a second language (L 2) or learnt as a foreign language. The first language a child picks-up before any other language in a language environment is regarded as the mother tongue or L 1 while a language like English language in Nigerian context is most likely the second language; that is, L 2 because English is our lingua franca in Nigeria being the language of our ex-colonial master. Then, in an Anglophone country such as Nigeria, French language, for instance, is a foreign language.

Language and culture are strongly interconnected. The two are items of identity. Culture represents the summation of a people's ways of life while language is the major tool that expresses both tangible and intangible aspects of a given culture. As a matter of fact, language is one of the main features that stand man out among other animals which makes him a higher animal. Yoruba language is one of the three major languages in Nigeria.

2. The Yoruba Language

Yoruba is among the kwa languages which is spoken in sub-Saharan African by about 25 million people; particularly in Nigeria, Benin Republic, Togo, Brazil and Cuba (Ihenacho, 1979: 61; Kolawole, 2013: 14). Yoruba is a tonal language and very different from almost all the foreign languages it comes in contact with in pronunciation as well as in grammatical structure.

Everywhere in the world, language is a mark of identity. It is a vehicle through which cultural heritage is expressed in spoken words or in written form. Simply put, language conveys "all the messages for the various cultural disciplines" (Ilesanmi, 2004: 36). Yoruba language is not only spoken in the South Western Nigeria which comprises Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti and Lagos States. The Yoruba language is also spoken as a native language in North Central States of Nigeria like Kwara and Kogi States. There are again Yoruba language native speakers outside Nigeria in countries such as The Benin Republic, Togo, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Cuba and Brazil.

The word proverb is derived from "*proverbium*", a Latin word (Arthur, 1998: 234). It implies a wise saying that proves a point of view. In decoding proverbs, socio-cultural and sociolinguistic realities of the language concerned must be taken into account. Proverbs are not interpreted based on the words that are combined to form them. They are philosophical, rhetorical, didactic and epistemological in nature. Proverbs are like idiomatic expressions. They communicate ideas with an intention to advise, enlighten, instruct, and express native intelligence, linguistic competence and cultural erudition (Adedimeji, 2003: 54).

Undoubtedly, it is established that in many Yoruba communities, even in the contemporary time, proverbs remain a potent instrument in the affairs of the State. That is why proverbs are portrayed as wisdom lore. They are used in conflict resolutions, motivating people to take relevant actions and teaching certain moral lessons as well as reminding people the origin of some historical events among other things.

3. Functionalist Theory of Translation

Christine Nord is one of the foremost proponents of the Functionalist theory of translation. The theory views translation as a communicative action carried out by experts in intercultural communication (Nord, 2007: 115). This approach to translation is instrumental in turning culture into one of the principal concerns of modern translation theory and methodology (Kolawole, 2013: 15). It is obvious that language plays an important function in its wider social and cultural contexts by emulating and sustaining cultural practices and social structures.

The functionalists are of the view that the situation under which a target text is produced is different from that of the source text in terms of time, place, and purpose and at times medium. Hence, the meaning of a text is found beyond the linguistic code in its extra textual context. The function of any text should be determined by the method of translation in the target culture. Therefore, a target text needs to be composed in a manner that it fulfils functions in the target context which should be compatible with the coder's (writer/speaker's) intention. Kolawole (2013: 15) observes:

> The Functionalist approach seeks to liberate translators from an excessively adherence to the source text looking at translation as a new communicative act that must be purposeful with respect to the translator's client.

It is enough to say, therefore, that functionalist theory is significantly connected to interpretative approach that is involved with the conversion of the linguistic meaning from a source language to sense.

4. Selected Proverbs for Conflict Resolutions

Some of the proverbs in this category make references to people or events in human societies. They express people's understanding of the world and its cosmological components.

S/N	Yoruba **Language**	English **Language**	French Language
1.	**Àgbà kìí wà lójà kórí omo tuntun wó.**	**If there is an elder in the market, a child's head will never bend on its mother's back.**	La tête d'un bébé n'est jamais penchée quand un grand est présent au marché.

The Yoruba people believe that a responsible elder will not permit a bad thing to happen to his people in his time. He should settle misunderstanding among his people to foster development through cooperation and sense of collective responsibility.

S/N	Yoruba Language	English Language	French Language
2.	Àgbà ò sí ìlú bàjé baálé ilé kú, ilé dahoro.	The compound becomes desolate without a leader.	Toute tombe en désarroi dans un quartier sans un leader.

Every family must have a leader who should coordinate the affairs of the family in all fronts. Family is the nucleus of any society and charity is believed to start from home. If there is no happiness at home, the whole society cannot have peace. The advice of the elders is golden to the progress of the society because such advice can be used in resolving misunderstanding and misinterpretations of history, ideas and perceptions. A family or a town without elders; egg-heads is doomed.

S/N	Yoruba Language	English Language	French Language
3.	Bía bá fa àgbò fún egúngún àá jòó fún un tokùn tokùn ni.	The rope and the sacrificial ram must be handed over to the masquerade.	On ne regarde plus les dents d'un cheval donné.

This proverb is asserting that when you help someone or do a thing for people, it should be done whole heartedly. That is without any ulterior motive. The adage is often used to resolve conflict when it is suspected that someone is expecting something in return for helping another person but the latter is reluctant in dancing to the tune of the former.

S/N	Yoruba Language	English Language	French Language
4.	Ènìyàn kìí dára dára kó má kùn sí bìkan, ibi tó kùn sí ni kí e wí.	No one is perfect.	Personne n'est parfait

From this proverb, one could infer that everybody has his/her weak point or shortcoming. Therefore, people need to bear this in mind and tolerate one another to avoid misunderstanding and, or chaos.

S/N	Yoruba Language	English Language	French Language
5.	Èsò pèlé làá fí pa àmúkùrù ù pèlé.	A sensitive issue must be handled with caution.	Dans une situation délicate, il faut de la patience.

In Africa, especially among the Yorubas, it is believed that every sensitive matter should be handled with caution. In other words, there is the need to be patient when there is a controversy so that the matter could be resolved without the breakdown of law and order.

5. Selected Proverbs for Warning

Many of the proverbs in this regard are rhetorical in nature. They make us see reasons why certain decisions should or should not be taken. They are pointers to good behaviour and successful life.

S/N	Yoruba Language	English Language	French Language
1.	Bí isu eni bá ta àá da owó bòó ni.	If your yam is fat, you should hide it from people.	Il faut savoir garder les secrets de son succès.

The proverb above warns against any unnecessary display of one's wealth or fortune which is very common nowadays on different social media platforms. This trend calls for moderation as many have been exposed to attacks as a result of the practice. If your harvest is bountiful keep it to yourself but thank your God.

S/N	Yoruba Language	English Language	French Language
2.	Àràbà túnra mú, odò ńgbé arère lo.	The timber must be careful when the stream carries away the baobab tree.	Que le chêne se fait attention quand la rivière emporte le baobab.

The message from this proverb is that people, especially those in positions of authorities or those who claimed they have certain power should not throw caution to the wind in all engagements because power whether political, spiritual or otherwise is transient. *Àràbà* (cotton tree) and *arère* (mahogany) are two powerful trees in Yoruba context. However, as powerful as *arère* seems to be, it is sometimes swept off by water current. Hence, people should know that there is no monopoly of power, anywhere in the world.

S/N	Yoruba Language	English Language	FRENCH LANGUAGE
3.	Akìí gbó kíkù òjò ká da omi agbada nù. Tí òjò kò bárò mó ńkó?	Do not throw away the water in the pot as the cloud forms because the rain might not fall. Do not count your chicken before they are hatched.	S'il ne pleut pas, celui qui renverse de l'eau de son réservoir au grondement du

			tonnerre regrettera sa stupidité.

Before one counts his or her blessings, one needs to let miracle happen first. It is suicidal to behave as if one knew tomorrow. This adage, therefore, warns that we should not count our chicken before they are hatched. In other words, we need not expect too much from what has not happened or raise our expectation more than necessary. We should always have patience in all that we do.

S/N	Yoruba Language	English Language	French Language
4.	Eni tí kò bátîì kúrò lódò kìí bú ìyá òni.	One who is still in the river should not insult the crocodile.	Il faut d'abord s'éloigner de la rivière avant d'insulter le crocodile.

This proverb instructs that anyone who has not accomplished his/her goals should not insult the sensibility and the intelligence of his/her people, especially when he/she is given a task to perform. It is imperative to get what you need before you begin to criticize a system, if at all; there is a need for such criticism.

S/N	Yoruba Language	English Language	French Language
5.	A kìí fi omo àparò sábé gbin okà.	A farmer must not harbour a sparrow while planting corns.	Ne pas semer du mil devant moineau.

The central message in this proverb is that you should not allow your enemy to know your tactics and/or secret. Another proverb which is nearest in meaning to this in Yoruba is "*A kìí tojú elésè mésán kàá*." We should always keep our secrets to ourselves. In other words, this adage warns that we should not trust anybody.

Selected Proverbs for Encouragement

These proverbs are meant to motivate as well as persuading people to do certain things. Some of them can make reference to history, stories, folktales, myths and legends.

S/N	Yoruba Language	English Language	French Language
1.	Eni tí eégún bá ńlé kó máa rójú, bó ti ńre ará ayé náà ló ńre ará òrun.	You must show perseverance at the point of a hot chase.	Quand on est pourchassé, la patience et la persévérance sont inéluctables.

There is nothing that has a beginning that does not have an end. This proverb encourages people to be patient in all their endeavours, particularly during any trying time. At the time of tribulations, one should demonstrate a good sense of perseverance. No though time can last forever. There is always a turning point.

S/N	Yoruba Language	English Language	French Language
2.	Bórí bápé nílè á dire.	Patience is blessing	La lumière vient après un long période d'obscurité.

The philosophy behind this proverb is the belief that nothing can be compared with patience, in an attempt to succeed in life and may be in the here-after. Even in the popular Holy books; the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Bible, God makes it an obligation for believers to have patience in all their dealings. *"Léhìn oní sùúrù ni Olórun wà"* (God is always with one who has patience).

S/N	Yoruba Language	English Language	French Language
3.	Apé kó tó jeun kìí je ìbàjé.	The patient dog eats the fattest bone.	Celui qui ne se précipite pas au repas mange le meilleur plat.

It is believed that the patient dog eats the fattest bone. The proverb encourages all and sundry to wait for God's time. Experience has shown that anyone who waits patiently for the God's appointed time will have cause to smile at the end. One has witnessed situations where a man waited for many years without a job or a wife but when he eventually got one, it was the best of its kind anybody would pray for.

S/N	Yoruba Language	English Language	French Language
4.	Nínú ìkòkò dúdú lèko funfun ti jáde.	The white pap is drawn out of the black pot.	La bouillie blanche est issue de la marmite noire.

It is obvious that someone's background or place of birth does not determine his success in life. This adage can be used to encourage people from poor background to develop power of positive thinking/reasoning that they can do better in whatever endeavour they find themselves. The life history of Major Prophets of God is a testimony to this proverb.

S/N	Yoruba Language	English Language	French Language
5.	Omo àjànàkú kìí yàrá, omo térin bábí erin níí jo	Like father, like son.	Un éléphant ne naîtra jamais antilope.

This proverb can be used to encourage a child to follow the good steps of his father so that he does not bring shame to his family. As a matter of fact, from all of these, Africans should return to the culture of hard work and the spirit of togetherness.

6. Conclusion

We can establish that the languages involved in this study; Yoruba, English and French languages have certain socio-cultural and sociolinguistic elements that have convincing semantic implications in common. Proverbs express knowledge, people's beliefs, arts, laws, morals, customs and values. This article has attempted to demonstrate the possibility of using proverbs in conflict management, as words of encouragement, instruments of entertainment as well as warning among other functions; especially by translating or interpreting them through the lens of functionalist theory of translation.

Every language has at least an equivalence of a proverb rendered in a specific language as we have shown in this study with Yoruba, English and French languages. It is, therefore, recommended that translators/interpreters should tap into the resources which are available in the use of proverbs. Again, the young generation should be taught or exposed to some of these proverbs, not only at school but also at home. The knowledge of some of these proverbs will improve the core value system and enhance a better society. It is believed that good leadership and followership can be attained with appropriate use of proverbs.

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