

Problems of translating two Nigerian novels into German

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ABSTRACT. The concept of translation has been, over time, mainly dominated by Western literary norms. But in the last few decades, African scholars as well as postcolonial scholars have emerged to develop new directions within translation studies that reflect their socio-cultural realities, imbedded in their ethnic languages and cultures. This was necessary because of the large number of books by African authors that emerged in the literary field starting in the 1950s until present times. Most of the books were written rooted on the authors' strong socio-cultural backgrounds. The Nigerian author Chinua Achebe once said that Africans have been given the English language, and they will do unheard things with it. This is precisely what this article is all about. It discusses how Nigerians have done unheard things with the English language, which have now become the foreign translator's burden. Two books written by two Nigerian authors, Amos Tutuola (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard*) and Ken Saro-Wiwa (*Sozaboy*) have been chosen as examples. How vital is the understanding of the socio-cultural implications of such language experimentations for the translation process? How far should the translator make the translation readable? What are the steps needed to be taken in order to find solutions to such language experimentations? These are some of the questions that are central to this article.

Key words: translation, English language, language experimentations, post-colonial studies.

RESUMO. Problemas de tradução de dois romances nigerianos para o alemão. O conceito de tradução tem sido ao longo da história dominado por normas literárias oriundas do norte da Europa. Todavia, nas últimas décadas, os acadêmicos e os teóricos pós-coloniais africanos começaram a desenvolver novas diretrizes para os estudos sobre tradução que revelam as realidades socioculturais embutidas em suas línguas e culturas étnicas. Esse fato foi necessário diante do grande número de livros escritos, no campo literário, por autores africanos e que foram publicados, a partir dos anos 1950 até o presente. A maioria dos livros foi escrita, a partir de diversos problemas de fundo sociocultural. O autor nigeriano, Chinua Achebe, afirmou que a língua inglesa foi dada aos africanos e com ela coisas incríveis poderão ser feitas por eles. É exatamente esse o conteúdo do presente artigo. Discutem-se como os autores nigerianos tem realizado façanhas com a língua inglesa, as quais se tornaram um verdadeiro peso para o tradutor estrangeiro. Tomaram-se, como exemplo, dois livros, *The Palmwine-Drinkard* e *Sozaboy*, respectivamente, escritos por Amos Tutuola e Ken Saro-Wiwa. Qual é a importância do conhecimento das implicações socioculturais dessas experimentações de linguagem para o processo tradutório? Até que ponto o tradutor tem obrigação de tornar legível a tradução? Que medidas são necessárias para descobrir soluções às experimentações de linguagem? São estas as perguntas inerentes a esse artigo.

Palavras-chave: tradução, língua inglesa, experimentação de linguagem, estudos pós-coloniais.

Introduction

Lucien Leites of the Union Publishing House in Zurich once said, "translation from another culture is the presumptuous attempt to transplant a living organism from one culture into another and keep it intact" (Adeaga, 2006, p. 116). This is precisely what translation is all about, because the experience being transmitted from one culture to another culture and language is still very much alive in that culture and should not get lost in translation. After all,

[...] the language device used in the original text determines the course the translation should take because 'literature is composed of words within a language, a language whose traits are given not only on a diachronic axis of unlimited duration, but also within the present moment on a synchronic axis, in which the comprehensible and current practice of the language is the only one immediately used or understood' (Adeaga, 2006, p. 57).

African critics like Kwame Anthony Appiah and Moradewun Adejunmobi have argued that the

translation of African literatures is a complex process. Appiah rightly asserts that a literary translation:

Aims at producing a text whose relation both to the linguistic conventions of the translation is relevantly like the relations of the object-text to its culture's conventions [...] A translation aims to produce a new text that matters to one community the way texts matter that this is not a question that convention settles; indeed, it is part of our understanding of literary judgement, that there can always be new readings, new things that matter about a text, new reasons for caring about new properties (Appiah, 2004, p. 397).

Thus, the translator has to be flexible and creative while translating foreign texts such as those written by African authors whose works are deeply rooted in their socio-cultural traditions. According to Moradewun Adejunmobi:

This variety of convictions expressed about the place of translation in African literature in European languages stands against the background of larger issues and controversies, involving the well-known ambivalent attitudes of African identity, invariably defined in terms of essential or incidental alterity. The importance attributed to the activity of translation in contemporary African literature therefore cannot be dissociated from persistent nostalgia for 'origins,' 'original languages', and most significantly for 'original identities.' The classifications and categories commonly referred to in translation yield insight into the factors involved in this quest for origins and the resulting construction of a literature of difference, a body of texts seeking to be identified as specifically African but written in European languages (Adejunmobi, 1998, p. 163).

Lawrence Venuti sums up African experiences as he claims that:

In Africa, Anglophone and Francophone texts have been characterized by a striking translingualism, where English and French are imprinted with lexical and syntactical features of indigenous languages like Ijo and Malinké. As Moradewun Adejunmobi indicates, novelists such as Nigerian Gabriel Okara and Ivorian Ahmadou Kourouma viewed their composing process as a form of translating. Their deliberate attempts to indigenize colonial languages deviate from the romantic notion of authorship as original self-expression and rather project transnational identities, at once African and European (Venuti, 1998, p. 137).

The translator has to understand the setting used by the author, in order to produce a work that does not deviate from the original (but there are naturally

some exceptions). This is the core of the African writers' works in the formal colonial language, which also applies to the two Nigerian works analyzed in this article. The multiple identities of the two authors, Amos Tutuola (*Palm-Wine Drinkard*, 1952) and Ken Saro-Wiwa (*Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English*, 1985) influence their works, which can prove to be tricky for foreign translators, as will be seen in the case of Ken Saro-Wiwa and Amos Tutuola. They both reflect two types of language localization: one that is deliberate, and another that is not.

Subsequently, this article is divided into four parts. The first part includes the introduction. It discusses the dynamics of translating texts from one foreign language and setting into another, with special emphasis on African literatures. This complex task demands knowledge of the author's language and the language and culture of the foreign language from which he or she is translating. The second part discusses the structure of Amos Tutuola's book, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and the problems of translating it into German. The third part is about Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*. It also discusses its structure and the complexity of translating the English variant used by the author into German. How successful were the German translators with the translation of these two English variants into their own language? Should the translator deviate from the original? These are some of the questions that will be discussed in these two parts. The conclusion will discuss the outcome of the translations of the two texts.

Translating Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* into German: the challenges

Amos Tutuola, born in 1920 (although the exact date is unknown)¹ in the town of Abeokuta, in the then Western Region of Nigeria, was a storekeeper in the Royal Niger Navy who started writing out of boredom. He completed his first full-length book, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* within a few days. According to him, he was a storyteller in school who heard his first folktales at his mother's knee. Stories told on Radio Nigeria at the time could also have awoken his interest in storytelling. He is said to have been inspired by his fellow Yoruba author, Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa² This source is questionable

¹ He was once asked during an interview and he said that he did not know the exact date.

² Fagunwa wrote *Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Irunmale* (1938). It was widely considered the first novel written in the Yorùbá language and one of the first to be written in any African language; Wole Soyinka translated the book into English in 1968 as *The Forest of A Thousand Demons*. Fagunwa also wrote *Igbo Olodumare* (*The Forest of God*, 1949), *Ireke Onibudo* (1949), *Irinkerindo ninu Igbo Elegbeje* (*Expedition to the Mount of Thought*, 1954), and *Adiitu Olodumare*

because they both worked from a common Yoruba folkloric background, which is not limited to only one storyteller. While Fagunwa wrote in Yoruba, Tutuola chose to write in English. This usage of the English language has also become his German translator's nightmare.

Structural composition

The course of Tutuola's fictitious drunk was charted along Yoruba myths and legends. The story begins in the manner of an oral narrative in which he holds court in his house. The main course on the menu is palm-wine. There is wine in abundance, thanks to his efficient "tapster". The drunk's problems only begin as his tapster passes on to the land of the dead. After consuming all the available wine, his friends and family forsake him.

The reader is then led through a string of stories, which are

largely adapted, the loose, episodic and non-sequential structure of the traditional tale to a novel format, and had taken over much of the oral legendary and mythological material unaltered (Griffiths, 1978, p. 12).

The stories are tied together with a cord of creative craft, strong enough to bear the weight of his colorful imagination. Tutuola carries the reader through an odyssey of wanderings, full of obstacles reminiscent of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*³ and Yoruba myths. In the course of these wanderings, the drunk always triumphs over his predicaments. He is portrayed under sympathetic conditions. For, despite the confidence in his prowess as a traveler, hunter and medicine man, which he often expresses, he still warms his way into the heart of the reader, as he remains humane in light of his successes. This style, finely laced with elements from Tutuola's immediate society does not only add depth of meaning, but also heightens suspense, creates humor and fascination. He generally manipulates myths to suit his own purpose.

Thus, after the journey through the mythical world of gnomes and goblins, where the imagery is colorful and dense, the reader is suddenly brought back to the present with a jolt. These jolts, which are elements of modernism and occur intermittently, have been qualified by Eustace Palmer as:

Tutuola cleverly adapts and transforms the inherited

stories, welding them into the framework of the themes of his own books. Skilful story teller that he is, the additions not only add depth of meaning, but also heighten suspense, create humor and fascination, and generally attempt to capture the spirit of folk tales as they are actually told. It is an integral part of Tutuola's handling of the traditional that he quite unashamedly incorporates into it elements from the modern technological world, thus imparting new vitality and interest. Moving with perfect ease within the imaginary fantastic world of the traditional, he is yet able to endow his creatures with modernistic trappings, thus attuning them to modern sensibilities. At times he merely takes images from the modern world into the traditional to give color and vividness to his stories, as when he says, for instance, that the baby resurrected from the ashes of Zurrjir 'speaks with a lower voice like a telephone' (Palmer, 1979, p. 18).

Modernity is welded into the traditional; the strips of differences existing between the two worlds are erased, and these are precisely what make his work appealing and captivating to his readers.

Language and the translation of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* into German

Indeed language plays a significant role in his text because his work is written in what is called "Yorubaenglish". This means that his narration is a rendition of verbal Yoruba language into English. Critics like Chantal Zabus (1992) have ascribed his English language usage to be the outcome of an incomplete Western education. She is alluding to the fact that his Western education only spanned a period of six years (from 1934-1939). Berndt Lindfors even observes that:

Tutuola's English is not English as it is spoken in West Africa though English could conceivably be spoken in his way by some groups in specific social classes. The English language spoken in West Africa is of a complex nature varying in character, from class to class, and according to the formal educational experience of the speaker. Schoolboy English (something which affronts Nigerian teachers of English who have read Tutuola) exists in Tutuola's language and so does officialese (Lindfors, 1980, p. 111).

Lindfors' observation is viable because Tutuola's English usage would have been different if he had come from another part of the country. This is due to the heavy regional impact that is an essential ingredient of cultural syncretism. Tutuola's English usage gives a local traditional flavor to the text that is quite demanding during its rendition into another language. Fellow Nigerian authors like Gabriel

(1961). See also *The Novels of D. O. Fagunwa* by AYO BAMGBOSE. Nigeria: Benin City, Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1974.

³ It was translated into Iloiswaju Ero-Mimo by the German Reverend David Hinderer (1800-1877) and published after his death by the Church Missionary Society, Lagos, in 1911. This novel was widely read by the Yorubas because it was almost as important as the Bibeli Mimo (Bible).

Okara for example see this style⁴, as a reflection of the African author's cultural heritage that should be retained in the European language. He expatiates further on this that:

As a writer who believes in the utilization of African ideas, African philosophy and African folklore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion that the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as a medium of his expression (Okara, 1991, p. 15).

This view, prompted by the need to localize former colonial languages in such a manner that they will also carry the weight of the African author and/or the former colonized experience, is also shared by the late Ivorian author, Ahmadou Kourouma who says that:

J'ai pensé en malinké et écrit en Français en prenant une liberté que j'estime naturelle avec la langue classique...J'ai donc traduit le malinké en français en cassant le Français pour trouver et restituer le rythme Africain (Koné, 1992, p. 83)⁵.

[I thought in Malinké and wrote in French while taking freedoms which I consider to be natural with the traditional language... I thus translated Malinké into French by breaking down the French language to find and restore the African rhythm].

Naturally, this proves to be a challenge to any foreign translator, including the German translator who can only attempt to localize Tutuola's text without distorting it. Therein lies the problem. What are the ways that a translator can use to achieve these aims? Ibrahim Muhawi attempts to answer that,

[...] the need for a theory of folkloristic translation arises from the nature of verbal folklore, which exists in the memory, suspended between orality and literacy, without the fixed form and capable of multiple realizations before manifesting itself as a performance that must be textualized to be translated (Muhawi, 2002).

Especially since Tutuola's folkloristic narration demands much understanding from the translator of the socio-cultural settings from which the author is working.

Tutuola has not only drawn richly from his oral narrative tradition, but he has used one-to-one

transliteration to render his story into written form⁶. Here are a few examples of some of the expressions found in his book. Each sentence from the text (the first line in each example) has been translated into Yoruba (line 2) and the third line is translated word-for-word from the Yoruba translation into English, the fourth line is Walter Hilsbecher's German translation and the last line is Standard English:

1. I was seriously sat down in my parlour (p. 8)⁷

Mo joko si páǎ̀ mi

I sat down at my parlour

Ich saß duster in meiner Wohnung (6)

I sat down in my parlour

2. Wonderful child (p. 33)

Omo àràmòndà

Child evil

Dieses merkwürdige Kind (30)

Mysterious child

3. This is only fear for the heart but not dangerous to the heart (p. 73)

Eleyi jẹ̀ èrù fun okan sugbòṇ kò l' éwu fun okan

This one is fear for the heart but is not dangerous for the mind

Das Herz fürchtet sich, aber es ist keine Gefahr für das Herz (70)

It can only make one afraid, but it cannot kill one (Adeaga, 2006, p. 95-96).

Instances such as those noted here can easily be mistranslated, misinterpreted, if the foreign translator does not pay much attention in the translation process. He says, "I was seriously sat down in my parlour" (Tutuola, 1952, p. 8). This sentence is difficult to render in German which is as follows: "Ich saß duster in meiner Wohnung" (Tutuola 1962, p. 6). What Tutuola means here is slightly different from what is projected in the translation. He means that the protagonist sat down in his sitting room which could have been in a house but by no means in an apartment. Another interesting example is presented when he says that:

When I felt that these strings did not allow me to breathe and again every part of my body was bleeding too much, then I myself commanded the ropes of the yams in his garden to tight him there, and the yams stakes should begin to beat him also. After I had said so and at the same time, all the ropes of the yam in his garden tightened him hardly, and all

⁴ Okara is alluding to the manner in which Tutuola writes English with a strong Yoruba background.

⁵ Tutuola, Okara and Kourouma are writing first and foremost for their African audience. They sought a compromise between their adopted former colonial languages and their own traditional cultures. They deconstructed these foreign languages to make their own cultural traditions visible.

⁶ The Stage version of *The Palm Wine Drinkard* by G.J. Axworthy called *Omúti*, opera by Kola Ogunmola, was transcribed and translated by R.G. Armstrong, Robert L. Awujola and Val Olayemi from a tape recording by R.G. Armstrong & Samson Q.Q. Amali, Ibadan, University of Ibadan Institute for African studies, 1972. "Kola Ogunmola and Hubert Ogunde first provided an operatic version (1963 and 1967) of the tale, *Omúti*. The performance was based not on *The Palm Wine Drinkard* but a translation of Tutuola's folk novel into Yoruba because it was found that it would be very difficult to set Tutuola's lyrics in English to truly African rhythms. In any case no orchestra employing African instruments existed which could perform from a written score" (Zabus, 1990, p. 105).

⁷ The page numbers have been included for reference purposes.

the yam stakes were beating him repeatedly, then he commanded the strings of the drum which tightened me to release me, and I was released at the same time (Tutuola, 1952, p. 12-13).

The German translator, Walter Hilsbecher translated it as follows:

Und als ich fühlte, daß ich überall blutete an meinem Körper, da befahl ich den Fasern des Yams in seinem Garten, ihn zu binden, und die Pfahlwurzeln des Yams sollten ihn schlagen. Und die Fasern des Yams in seinem Garten banden ihn, schnürten ihn ein, und alle Yamwurzeln schlugen ihn, und als er einsah (der Tod), dass sie ihn immer noch mehr schlagen würden, da befahl er den Stricken der Trommel, die mich freilassen, und im selben Augenblick war ich auch frei (Tutuola, 1962, p. 10-11).

As we can see, his indigenized language dominates the quotation and reflects the voice of an adult with an incomplete mastery of the English language. Since the word “tightened” does not exist in English, the German translator simply used “banden” which means “tightened.” These are some of the encounters of German translators with African literatures that have indigenized elements in them. Unlike the English language, which in itself has been localized by former colonial users, Germany did not leave lasting effects in its former colonies. Consequently, the German language could not be broken down enough to make it compatible with Tutuola’s narration.

Language deconstruction is necessary in this instance, because there is the tendency in some cases for the translator to decide to use German dialects as an option. But this is completely wrong. Dialects are by no means refined or broken German. They are in fact languages on their own that portray the lives of Germans⁸. Tutuola’s language is not Pidgin English because it does not display any of the characteristics commonly found in it. Instead, it is closer to refined English because of the narrative trend it has taken. It is oral in nature and flows in such a manner that it is quite difficult to know where the English language starts and where the Yoruba language ends. Given Tutuola’s narrative mode, the only solution is to modify the German language to fit into the author’s narrative expression. Any attempt to do otherwise, like write it in Standard German is going to distort the narration, because the greatest attraction in the book lies in its narrative mode, his language usage. This is precisely the reason why the British publishing house Faber and Faber in republishing

Tutuola (1995) chose not to rewrite the language used by the author; they claimed it was what gave it its magical flair. However, the German translation has been reedited (in 1994) to include a few parts such as headings of chapters such as “Do not follow unknown man’s beauty” (Tutuola, 1994, p. 19) and “Afraid of touching terrible creatures in bag” (Tutuola, 1994, p. 103). Sentences such as “We remained in that hospital for a week under treatment before our heads brought out full-grown hair, then we went back to the Faithful-Mother and she gave us a room” (Tutuola, 1994, p. 69) were also left out.

Ken Saro-Wiwa’s *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English* (1985)

Saro-Wiwa’s first novel, *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English*, an antiwar work was written in “rotten English”. Its title means “soldier boy”. The story is partly based on Saro-Wiwa’s own experiences, and is about a naïve young man who serves as a soldier during the Biafran War. Saro-Wiwa uses the dress as a symbol for *Sozaboy*, the protagonist called Mene’s increasing awareness of the true nature of the military. Mene’s sole attraction to the army is the uniform: “When I see all their uniform shining and very very nice to see [...] Immediately, I know that this soza is wonderful thing” (Saro-Wiwa, 1985, p. 143). When he joins, he is “prouding because of this uniform” (Saro-Wiwa, 1985, p. 144). Soon, however, he realizes “until I get gun I cannot be proper soza” (Saro-Wiwa, 1985, p. 145). When Mene is fully clothed in a uniform with a gun, he says, “[e]verybody seem bigger than before; whether because of new uniform or because of gun, I do not know”. Indeed he believes that his gun and uniform would give him power, but this was not the case. When his friend Bullet is killed, he becomes disillusioned and takes off the uniform. This antiwar story is all about the effects of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) on Nigerians, especially the Ibos or those who fought on the Biafran side. Young men were sent to fight in a war, but they were not told the reason behind it.

Translating *Sozaboy*... into German

While Tutuola’s English is a product of his limited Western education, Saro-Wiwa’s narration is a deliberate rendition of the English language in a manner that represents a multifarious Nigerian society. Saro-Wiwa himself called his English variant “rotten English”. In his authorial note in *Sozaboy*, he stated that Rotten English is:

A mixture of Nigerian Pidgin English, broken

⁸ Dialects spoken in Germany vary from village to village. They were already in existence before Standard German was developed through Martin Luther’s (1483-1546) translation of the Holy Bible.

English and occasional flashes of good, even idiomatic English. This language is disordered and disorderly. Born of a mediocre education and severely limited opportunities, it borrows words, patterns and images freely from the mother-tongue and finds expression in a very limited English vocabulary. To its speakers, it has the advantage of having no rules and no syntax. It thrives on lawlessness, and is part of the disclosed and discordant society in which Sozaboy must live, move and have not his being (Saro-Wiwa, 1985, p. 4).

These are just about the only major significant qualities this English variant shares with Pidgin English. While the latter is the product of contacts between Africans in the coastal areas and European merchants during the transatlantic trade as parts of Africa were subsequently colonized, Rotten English is composed of elements drawn from local languages and the English language.

However, the language was not invented by Saro-Wiwa as one would have thought. Instead, it had been used on television for more than a decade before his book was published. It was used in the "New Masquerade" television comedy by the protagonist, Chief Zebrudaya, whose English and big words were meant to reflect his high status in society. Chantal Zabus concedes that:

In the Nigerian context of broadcasting, a quasi-creolized Pidgin has indeed already been fashioned to meet the needs of the Nigerian Television Authority Network. For instance, the television drama *Samanja*, which was originally transmitted in Hausa on the Kaduna station, was 'changed to a variety of Pidgin' once it was elevated to network status. Most Nigerian comedy on television is being written in Pidgin (Zabus, 1990, p. 112-113).

This quasi-creolized Pidgin is what Saro-Wiwa later called "rotten English". This shows the complexity of English-language usage in Nigeria. Contrary to assertions by foreign critics like Christian Mair that it is a "daring and imaginative experiment, because it shows the writer drawing on the collective expressive potential of a 'new' variety of English to fashion his individual literary style" (Mair, 1992, p. 279), the previous quotation shows that this variant was already in use long before Saro-Wiwa's book *Sozaboy* was published. However,

both television programs were not the only inspirational sources used by Saro-Wiwa which demand the attention of the translator and critic. The other important source is found in his language usage, rooted in the English variant of the Dukanas in the Ogoni area of the Delta state of Nigeria. This language demands from the translator a general understanding of several English variants spoken in

that part of the country, because if he has hardly any sensitivity for Pidgin composition itself, creating a 'rotten German' variant to fulfill this piece of art's requirements may prove to be too complex a task (Adeaga, 2006, p. 92).

Grotjahn-Pape took up the task of translating *Sozaboy* into German. The complexity of the translation process is manifested as Saro-Wiwa intermittently reverts to Pidgin English during conversations, such as that between Zaza, Duzia, Terr Kole, Bom and Mene:

Look eh, this Duzia and Bom are nonsense people, you know. That is what I was thinking as I leave them. Do you hear how they are talking? It is good thing that this Duzia cannot walk, you know. Because if he can walk as he is talking, he will make plenty trouble for Dukana. Even sef, the man no get any work to do, just to go about knocking tory and making people to laugh. When I think of what Bom and Duzia are saying, I laugh plenty, plenty, although I cannot laugh before because of Terr Kole and because they will think I am prouiding, no respect for old people because I have married young, beautiful Lagos girl (Saro-Wiwa, 1985, p. 64-65).

As we can see, this speech lacks syntax and stretches the English language to its limits. Any omission or mistake in the translation will make it lose its humor. The German translator, Grotjahn-Pape's translation is as follows:

Ehrlich, was sind Duzia und Bom nur für Schwachköpfe! Das hab ich mir gedacht, als ich weggegangen bin. Wie sie geredet haben! Ein Glück, dass dieser Duzia nicht gehen kann. Weil wenn er so gehen könnte, wie er redet, dann würde es ziemlich viel Palava in Dukana geben. Der Mann ist ein Nichtsnutz, sitzt nur rum und quatscht und bringt die Leute zum Lachen. Als ich über das nachgedacht hab, was Bom und Duzia gesagt haben, da musste ich ja auch lachen. Aber als ich mit ihnen geredet hab, da hab ich nicht gelacht, wegen Terr Kole, und weil sie nicht glauben sollten, ich bin ein Angeber und ehre die alten Leute nicht mehr, nur weil ich so ein junges, schönes Mädchen aus Lagos geheiratet habe (Saro-Wiwa, 1997, p. 92-93).

He has used his imagination to integrate this sentence into "refined German." But apparently, his efforts were not good enough. The original displays two types of English variants.

The first stage displays Nigerian everyday English used in the present tense. The fifth and sixth lines are in Pidgin after which he reverts back to Nigerian English through a few words such as 'I laugh plenty, plenty' and 'they will think I am prouiding'. They are neither refined English sentences nor Pidgin, they are simply Nigerian English expressions sometimes used

by preliterate inhabitants. But Grotjahn-Pape has not completely drawn a line of demarcation between the two experimental shades (Adeaga, 2006, p. 92).

Another important point is the idiomatic usage of the word “Lomber” for the English word “number” for all the chapters. To understand the significance of this word, the translator needs to have background knowledge of the history of the people living in that part of the Niger Delta where Saro-Wiwa based his narration. This word carries a lot of weight and means a lot. It is not just a word; it is deeply imbedded in the author’s culture. But the translator did not understand these implications. Instead, as noted in my book, *Translating and Publishing African Language(s) and Literature(s), Examples from Nigeria, Ghana and Germany* (2006), he translated it into German as “Numero”, which reminds one of a roman letter and not a word that is depicting the lives of a people. A more appropriate word would have been “Lummer”, because it is closer to the original as well as the German end-translation. The reason behind this is that people from that part of the Niger Delta mainly cannot pronounce the letter “n” and “j”, among others. Instead of “n” they say “l” and instead of “j” they say “y”. Thus, we find “number” suddenly becoming “lomber”. Since the German language does not have such idioms, the intricacies of translating such English variants into readable German are quite challenging. It is as a result of this that Grotjahn-Pape did not succeed in rendering the translation in a just manner.

Thus, what we see here, as we had seen earlier in Tutuola’s book, is that Saro-Wiwa’s texts display a rendition of verbal language from his native culture into English with smatterings of idiomatic English known to the reader. This text demands not only language flexibility, but also high levels of bilingualism and understanding of both cultures. There is no doubt that no translation is ever perfect, but more attention should be paid to the original, because it is the translator’s duty to produce translations that do not deviate from the original. My experience with the recent translation of Beninese author Olympe Bhêly Quénou’s *C’était à Tigouny* reflects this experience. The author based his narration on an eponymous (fictitious) African country. In addition to this, he invented his own African language called, “kinokoroni” and words such as “Karinioni” or “Karinioni icé” (Bhêly-Quénou, 2000, p. 371) were used. They were left untouched because they could not be translated. He also broke down the French language to reflect the speaker’s social status. This means he used what I call

“petit Français” in some instances. During a fight between some dock workers and their French employer, one of the workers said: “pou su, le Blan i nouzaéklké, hein?” I had to choose but to translate it in such a way that the author’s thought is not distorted. I translated this sentence into: “Definitely, de lite man lipped us off, right?” This is in essence what translation is all about. Since no author wants a translator to rewrite his work because it is not the message he is putting across to his readers, the translator must retain the author’s specific thoughts⁹. This was essentially what I did. Also, a translation should be readable and worth buying. Especially now that more and more readers prefer the original to the translation, more efforts need to be put into making such books marketable; otherwise they will collect dust on the booksellers’ shelves.

Conclusion

Translation has over time expanded to include more cultures and traditions. Especially since the translation of any foreign book also entails intercultural translation. This is especially true of African books written within African contexts. Therefore, Nigerian literatures, like many Third World literatures, demand individual evaluations during the translation process. As these two texts have shown, there are many English variants existing in Nigeria that have found their ways into literature. These variants have become the foreign translator’s headache. They prod him into stretching his language, in order to reconstruct it in a manner that will reflect the author’s thoughts. Some of such attempts are successful, while others become the booksellers’ nightmare. This is nothing unusual, because foreign texts are sometimes so complex in nature that they need more than the customary literary translation process that texts usually undergo. The foreign translator finds himself translating not only the foreign language but also the socio-cultural implications that come with it. Subsequently, a Nigerian translator of a German text with Pidgin German into English or any of the

⁹ In a recent article called “Black author cries foul” published in *The African Courier*, (Germany) December/January 2007/2008, Mathias Victorien Ntep wrote about the case of Sylvia Serbin, a Black historian, journalist who lives in Paris, France. She published a book entitled “Reines d’Afrique et heroines de la diaspora noire” with Sepia Publishing House in 2005. In this book, she highlighted twenty-two African female leaders who played significant roles in their communities in Africa and the Americas. Sepia sold the translation rights to a German publisher called Peter Hammer Verlag without Serbin’s knowledge. Serbin accidentally came across the German translation (“Afrika’s Königinnen”) on the internet and got herself a copy. She got her acquaintances to translate parts of it for her so she could compare it with the original. She found out that many passages were scrapped in the German version, others were rewritten, and some of the ideas and expressions present in the original were missing in the German translation. Others that she did not express in the original version were added. In the process, precisely those racist and colonial misconceptions about women leaders she had taken great pains to resolve were reinstated. She subsequently sued the German publishing house for counterfeiting her book.

indigenous Nigerian languages would encounter similar problems in finding suitable equivalents that also reflect his own culture.

German translators are indeed aware of the challenges presented by these foreign literatures. In my book, *Translating and Publishing African Language(s) and Literature(s): Examples from Nigeria, Ghana and Germany* (2006), German translators conceded that the problem of translating Pidgin English in Nigerian and African texts into German cannot be resolved with Pidgin German because officially, there is no such thing as Pidgin German. All attempts to invent this form of German have been unsuccessful, in part because those who are trying to invent it are separating it from the German culture. This is wrong because Pidgin English is intertwined with the culture of a people. Pidgin English develops with the increased changes in the society, thus it is not static. But the German translator, or any translator for that matter, who takes on books of such nature should translate them in such a way that they do not deviate from the original. More importantly, they should also reflect the translator's cultural background. This means that the author's culture should be transplanted into the translator's culture and it should fit into it.

One major example is presented by Tutuola's unique language that makes him stand out from other Nigerian writers. His language is refreshing and carries a lot of elements of the Yoruba narrative tradition with it. It is raw and unrefined. It speaks to the reader, and this effect is also required in the German translation and in any other language. The same thing applies to Saro-Wiwa and his experimentation with Rotten English and other Nigerian English variants. What is mostly overlooked in such a text is that there are multiple voices within a paragraph. The translator who is unaware of this merely translates with one voice. This is where the confusion starts because with time, it obliterates the powerful narrative energy in the original and strips it of its initial appeal to its audience.

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