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Are Translators Traitors? A Philosophical Perspective of Loss and Gain in Translation

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Abstract- Translators act as a key bridge that enables cross-cultural communication more so in multilingual contexts as is the case in Kenya. Among the challenges facing the process of translation is the rendering of meanings conceived in the source text as closely as possible in the translated text. This process is complex and has made some scholars to regard translation as an impossible exploit since it can never be totally equivalent to the original. Translators have been labeled "traitors" since even the best of their efforts can never bring out the intended meaning in the original text as was conceptualized by the author. This paper seeks to provide a philosophical understanding on the aspect of loss and gain in translation. It seeks to underpin the complexity of the "word" and hence the meaning rendered by these words. Using Nord's conceptualization of translation as a purposeful activity, we seek to analyze functionally the translation of "The Beasts of England" in Animal Farm from English to Kiswahili - Shamba la Wanyama.

Keywords: translation, loss, gain, meaning.

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Are Translators Traitors? A Philosophical Perspective of Loss and Gain in Translation

Magugu V. Njeru

Abstract- Translators act as a key bridge that enables cross-cultural communication more so in multilingual contexts as is the case in Kenya. Among the challenges facing the process of translation is the rendering of meanings conceived in the source text as closely as possible in the translated text. This process is complex and has made some scholars to regard translation as an impossible exploit since it can never be totally equivalent to the original. Translators have been labeled "traitors" since even the best of their efforts can never bring out the intended meaning in the original text as was conceptualized by the author. This paper seeks to provide a philosophical understanding on the aspect of loss and gain in translation. It seeks to underpin the complexity of the "word" and hence the meaning rendered by these words. Using Nord's conceptualization of translation as a purposeful activity, we seek to analyze functionally the translation of "The Beasts of England" in Animal Farm from English to Kiswahili - Shamba la Wanyama. The ensuing discussion is key to the enhancement of translation as an inquiry into the meaning of texts and words. It will further look at the transposition of these meanings from one language, and thus one community and culture, into another target language, community and culture.

Keywords: *translation, loss, gain, meaning*

I. Introduction

Different communities conceptualize the world the live in differently. Taking the world to refer to both the ontological and the logical constituents of the environment one lives in, it follows that different people experience and conceptualizes the world differently. These differences become manifest through the language used as well as the cultural inclinations and requirements which vary from one polis to the other.

Gain in translation on the one hand refers to the enrichment or clarification of the Source Text (ST) which enables language and the Translated Text (TT) to be flexible and usable in any social circle (Nozizwe & Ncube, 2014). Gains can either be deliberate or coincidental. When deliberate, they are a result of the translator's' creativity and are aimed at meeting the need of the target audience linguistically and culturally. It involves a manipulation of the ST through[1] rewriting, and [2]domestication in order to suit the needs of the target audience. On the other hand, loss in translation the Target Language (TL) text present in the ST. It is largely from what Jakobson (1959) in Munday (2008) describes as the lack of total linguistic equivalence between any two languages. The loss results from the untranslatability of some elements at linguistic or cultural levels which result in the diminishing of the expressiveness and vividness of the ST. As-Safi (2006) expounds loss in a binary classification, i.e. Inevitable loss; caused by the divergent linguistic and cultural systems versus Avertable loss; attributed to the translator's failure to find appropriate lexical and syntactic forms to represent those in the ST.

The issue of gain and loss in translation; be it linguistic or cultural remains a challenge for translators. Consider for instance the concept of life after death within the religious circles. Christianity postulates the concept of heaven whereas the African Traditional Societies (ATS) talk of the underworld/the land of ancestors. Christianity on the one hand conceptualizes heaven; where the good souls go after death, to be "above" the earth (somewhere beyond the skies) whereas the ATS conceptualization of underworld denotes a place "below" the earth. Juxtaposing Heaven against Underworld within this context can be said to be functionally synonymous but the referents, above and below are opposites. Such are the complexities that surround languages and culture.

Translation as a practice often deals with the transference of meanings in texts from one language into (an)other language(s). As stated earlier, the lack of linguistic and cultural equivalents makes this a daunting task to accomplish. As Van Djik (1977) points out, texts are defined and bound by the cultural and linguistic contexts within which they are produced. Any attempts to translate such texts therefore requires that the translator interprets the context involved correctly and to adapt/ recreate this context to suit the function of the translated text and the target audience. This is key if the rendering in the translation is to be considered acceptable and by extension to be good[3].

In this paper, I seek to build an understanding of these constraints in translation as well as explore how

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[1] Rewriting here is used to refer to the inevitable intentional manipulation of the ST in order to meet the purpose and guidelines set for the specific translation.

[2] Domestication refers to the process of replacing the source culture and culturally bound linguistic elements with the target culture and its linguistic elements.

[3] A translation is perceived to be good if it renders the senses contained in the ST in a manner that meets the expectations of the target audience with respect to linguistic choice and cultural considerations as well as its ability to meet the purpose for which it was commissioned.

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they affect the process of translation with regard to loss and gain. The analysis carried out is hinged on the thoughts of Nord (1997) on the functional approach to translation. In defense of translators, the paper aims at bringing to the fore the intricacies of language and by extension of translation and communication.

II. Loss and Gain in Translation: A Functional Understanding

Nord (ibid) explains that communication involves use of signs; verbal and nonverbal, which are associated with a concept or meaning by the producer, receiver or both. In translation, written signs dominate in the intercultural communication that is at the core of the translation process. The producers (translators) and the receivers

(TT audience) must have some kind of agreement about the meaning of the signs used. Lack of agreement on the signs used and the concepts results in errors in terms of [4]mistranslation or [5]missed translation.

Every language system differs from the other in terms of signs and senses attributed to each. Taking every translation as a purposeful activity; the choices made with regard to signs are aimed at attaining the intended purpose. However, the representation of concepts in the source text may not be transferrable equivalently in the target language and culture. For example; in English, it is acceptable to say

*Jane **married** John*

which will have the same meanig as;

*John **married** Jane*

This however is not acceptable in Kiswahili and many other African languages where it is perceived that only the man has the power to perform the action of marrying and thus the only acceptable translations for these sentences in Swahili will be

*Jane **aliolewa** na John (Jane got married to John)*

*John **alimuoa** Jane (John Married Jane)*

Translation scholars concur that every translation involves an aspect of loss and or gain. In this paper, the argument is not centered on the semantic loss or gain, rather it seeks to underpin the complexity of the losses and or gains in translations by establishing the construct of a word within a language.

In discussing philosophy in translation, Young (2014:41) highlights the gains experienced by indicating that:

...when philosophy is translated into another language; instead of loss, there is transformation. Instead of reduction there is Creation.

From this citation, it is evident that the issue of loss; what Young call reduction, and that of gain; in Young's language creation, are present in translating philosophy. He sees these aspects as ever present and I concur. However, I ask the question; What necessitates the occurrence of loss or gain? How does the existence of these aspects affect the function of the TT? How does this affect the efficacy of communication intended in the ST? How does this affect the purpose envisioned by the translator throughout the translation process?

Elsewhere, Bassnett (2014) concurs that discourses that view translations as platforms for loss, betrayal and failure are overtaken by the re-evaluation championed by scholars such as Lefevere (1992) who look at translation as a rewriting process. Despite this development that goes beyond the classical discourse of fidelity and equivalence in translation, this advancement in translation studies discourse still does not address the issue of loss and gain. Any form of rewriting in essence always will result in an alteration of the source text and as such entails some kind of loss or gain. It is from this point that I argue for the understanding of loss and gain within a functional paradigm whereby the focus isn't much on the semantic loss or gain but rather on the functionality of these attributes of translation.

The understanding that I seek on these aspects is found within various theoretical propositions over time that have culminated in several aspects being key to translation theory i.e. the context; cultural, linguistic as well as situational; the genre of the text involved and the purpose/function of the translation. At the backdrop of these aspects, scholars such as Hatim & Mason (1990, 1997) and Hatim & Munday (2004) have proposed approaches such as domestication and foreignization[6] in translation. The propositions shed some light on the intricacies of loss and gain more so with regard to lexical choices made in a translation. The translators make calculated manipulation of the ST and any losses or gains that are intentional are geared towards ensuring communication. This is manifest through the careful choices made by the translator in choosing the words to use and the sentence structure to adopt.

a) The Word And The Sentence In Translation

As Kahiga (2014) posits in discussing philosophy of language, there is a mutual interdependence between words, sentences and meaning. These aspects within linguistics are best understood within semantics by looking at the relationship between symbols (syntax), their relationship to concepts (semantics) and their relationship to things other than symbols (pragmatics). The symbols that constitute any language are, among others, words

[4] An error of mistranslation occurs when the signs used in the TT do not represent the senses contained in the signs used in the ST.

[5] Missed translation results from omissions that affect the cohesion and the communicative ability of the TT.

[6] Foreignization refers to the process of transposing foreign cultural and culturally bound linguistic elements onto the TL such that the TT reads as a foreign text.

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formed and agreed upon to be used within a particular language community and understood by the users primarily in the process of communication. In translation, not only is a translator tasked with the transference of meanings from ST to the TT, but also is expected and required to choose symbols that can best represent the information contained in the ST within the TL system.

In translation, the debate over what is paramount between the word used in a text and the senses contained in the particular word dates back to Horace and Cicero. However, over the years, scholars concur that the sense is more important especially when taking translation to be a communicative and a purposeful activity (Newmark, 1988; Nida & Taber (1969); Reiss & Vermeer, 1984; Nord, 1997, Munday 2006). Any effort in understanding the issue of loss and gain in translation however needs to incorporate both the words and senses in a text more so the words, semantic meanings as well as the pragmatic meanings in the text. Words used in different context evoke different senses. Therefore, understanding the renderings within any translation dictates the inclusion of context in interpreting the signs and the senses within.

Malmkjaer (2012) rightfully argues against the notion that the meaning of a term is the thing in the world that it refers to. Rather, she advocates for an understanding that the sense of a sentence is the thought it expresses. Going by this argument, while translating, the paramount aspect to consider is the sense with regard to the thought it puts forth.

III. Loss and Gain in the Translation of Beasts of England in Animal farm into Swahili

In this section I analyze loss and gain within an actual translation. I cite examples from the translation of "The Beasts of England" in George Orwell's Animal Farm (1945:6-7) into Kiswahili "Ndugu zangu e Wanyama" by Fortunatus Kawegere (1967:14-15). This song is important in the novel since it is the rallying call for the animal uprising that results in the overthrow of Mr. Jones (The tyrant human beings) from The Manor Farm. This ushers in the major conflict within the novel; the antagonism amongst the animals themselves. Its translation therefore is key in signaling the approach taken by the translator as well as in ensuring that the TT operates at the same level with the ST functionally and communicatively

a) Semantic Versus Pragmatic Meaning

Newmark (1982) in discussing semantic translation avers that it attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the Target Language (TL) allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original. We can further argue that semantic translation is thus limited to the efforts of transposing semantic meanings of the text in the TL. These meanings are the basic senses of the words used in a text and are often the senses captured in dictionaries. Although a semantic translation is accurate, Newmark (ibid) argues that it may not communicate well. Again it appears to be limited to the existence of semantic equivalents between the ST and the TL which as stated earlier is a mirage.

However, despite this major shortfall, semantic meanings within a text is often the point of departure in a translators bid to correctly interpret texts. Therefore, one cannot overlook this meaning in totality. Rather, once the semantic meaning of a word is established, it is the translator's task to analyze the way a specific word or phrase has been used within a text. This ushers in the pragmatic level of meaning which is concerned with studying the ways in which context contributes to meaning. Therefore, the translator drawing from the context of use; be it linguistic, cultural or even historical, is able to arrive at the correct interpretation of a word within a text. It helps ensure that the sense transferred captures the thought intended by the author of the ST.

Going by this discussion, the translation of "The Beasts of England" into "Ndugu zangu e Wanyama" ought to not only render the semantic meanings conceptualized but also strive to transfer the original thought as interpreted within the context of use. All this should be done to ensure that the text attains the intended purpose/function and servers the target audience as the translator intended. This calls for a communicative translation which as Newmark (1982) explains attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the source language.

b) Semantic and Communicative Gains and Loss

This section discusses gains within the translation in focus citing practical examples both at the semantic and the communicative levels. For example, the title

ST: *The Beasts of EnglandHas been translated as;*

TT: *Ndugu zangu e Wanyama*

Semantically, this translation is not equivalent. One may argue that it doesn't render the senses detailed in the ST. For instance, the word England has been omitted in the translation. However, communicatively, the TT functions at the same level as the ST. Going by the historical context of the ST, the novel Animal Farm, is set in the context of todays United Kingdom (UK) which consists of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Capital of UK is London which is in England. Therefore, the choice of "Beasts of England" Could be seen as symbolic to include all constituents of the greater UK. The Kiswahili translation is produced by Fortunatus Kawegere, a Tanzanian. However, Kiswahili is a language that is used

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beyond the Tanzanian borders in countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and other countries of the East and Central Africa. The translation provided in Kiswahili as "Ndugu" literally could be used to mean brethren, Citizen or friend. This could be seen to operate at the same level as the use of England in the ST where in the original; all constituents are united politically whereas the referents in the Kiswahili version are united linguistically. This choice therefore if interpreted within the narrow confines of semantics results in a loss but when analyzed communicatively, it passes for a creative communicative rendering that seeks to attain an equivalent effect on the target audience hence a gain.
Looking at the translation of the phrase;

ST: Soon or late the day is coming
Tyrant man shall fall
And the fruitful fields of England
Shall be trod by beasts alone

TT: Binadamu atakwisha
Shamba zote za Matunda
Zitakuwa za wanyama
Siku hiyo ya furaha

The translator reorganizes the stanza where the first line of the ST becomes the last of the TT. This rearrangement doesn't affect the meaning and communicative ability of the phrase. However, looking at the translation provided for the lines

ST: Tyrant man shall fall
And the fruitful fields of England

There is a manifestation of loss within the Swahili version:

TT: Binadamu atakwisha
Shamba zote za Matunda

The adjective "Tyrant" is completely lost. This Omission is an instance of both semantic and communicative loss. The trait ascribed to "man" is of great importance not only within this song but also in the advancement of the plot and major conflicts within the novel. The Kiswahili translation; "Binadamu" generalizes "man" without denoting any particular features that pushes the 'singers' to predict his fall. Further, the phrase "fruitful fields of England" has been translated as "Shamba zote za matunda". The translator in this instance is able to maintain a semantic congruence between the ST and the TT. This results in a communicative loss. The term "Fruitful" in the ST refers to the productivity of the fields. However, the translation provided, "matunda" is semantically deficient put communicatively evokes the concept of productivity.

Another instance of loss and gain within this translation is manifest in the translation provided for the following phrase:

ST: For that day we all must labour
Though we die before it break;
Cows and horses, geese and turkeys,
All must toil for freedom's sake

TT: Sisi sote twapaswa
Kujitahidi sana
Farasi ng'ombe na mbwa
Uhuru kuutafuta.

In this translation, the translator employs various strategies including omission such as in the case in leaving out the line "Though we die before it break", and elsewhere employs the use of alternatives as in the translation of the line "cows and horses, geese and turkeys" into "farasi, ng'ombe na mbwa" (horses, cows and dogs). These strategies both result in loss and gain. On the one hand, the omission in this translation leaves out important information that points to the extent of sacrifice that is called upon in the struggle for freedom. On the other hand, the use of an alternative; "Mbwa" which means dogs for "geese and turkeys" is semantically inappropriate. Even if the translator wanted to ensure that the song rhymed in Kiswahili, the use of a word such as 'bata' which is a superordinate term that encompasses ducks, geese and turkeys would be closer semantically. However, ducks aren't as aggressive as the geese and turkeys are. The two birds referred to in the ST were used as sentries more often than men during the medieval period. The functional equivalent for these animals in the Swahili culture is dogs. Hence, although at the surface level the translation rendered may appear inappropriate, an analysis reveals that it operates at the same level in terms of thought and sense. This can be classified as a gain more so since it is easier for the readership of the TT to relate dogs with war as opposed to geese and turkeys. Despite this conclusion, the understanding is largely speculative due to the fluidity of meanings in words.

IV. Conclusion

This paper examined the aspect of loss and gain in translation with a view of expounding on its complexity. Other than providing general observations on these phenomena, the paper has provided a practical analysis as a supplement to illustrate the preceding discourse. From the analysis, it is evident that what may appear as a loss, more so semantically, may actually be a gain, communicatively and functionally, aimed at providing the efficacy and vividness that the target audience can identify with and comprehend. Although there are instances of loss due to the translators' shortfalls, the ability to render the thoughts and senses intended in the ST in an 'equivalent' manner is a daunting task that requires the translator to be creative and dynamic. The dynamism is what vindicates translators against being labeled traitors especially while dealing with the ever fluid meanings of words.

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