



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: A
ARTS & HUMANITIES - PSYCHOLOGY
Volume 22 Issue 5 Version 1.0 Year 2022
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Translating Poetry into Indigenous Languages: The Case of Igbo Language

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GJHSS-A Classification: DDC Code: 370.1523 LCC Code: LB1060



Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



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Abstract- Poetry belongs to the literary genres. It is characterized by imagery, flowery expressions, emotions, proverbs, idioms etc. Most times, it is connotative and subject to many interpretations. Each poem conveys a particular message, formulated in words specific to a language and culture. Poetry, therefore, is deeply rooted in culture and no two cultures are the same. Translating a poem from one language to into the framework of a totally different language gives cumbersome results. All these factors make the translation of poetry an uphill task and requires a great deal of rigor. Translation of poetry is a recreation of the source language (SL) poetry in the target language (TL). The dilemma of a translator of poetry is then how to recreate the poem of the source language to the target language while maintaining the structures of source language poem: rhyme, rhythm, meter etc. The structural differences between languages constitute another bottleneck for the translator. The challenges become more complicated when working with two languages, English and Igbo languages that are very wide apart in areas of development, structures, worldviews and cultures. How do we strike a balance between the semantic content and adhere to the aesthetic form? The thrust of this paper is to explore the possibility of translating two English poems into the Igbo language, analyze the problems encountered and suggest ways to make the translator's job less cumbersome.

Keywords: culture, fidelity, poetry, literary translation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Translation is not a simple search for lexical equivalents to the words in a text. The poem belongs to the literary field which involves the translation of the three major literary genres namely, prose, poetry and drama. The translation of a poem is very difficult because of certain specific elements: the use of particular language; cultural differences and the complexity of the language. Language of poetry differs from common linguistic usage because: poetry often employs words excluded from common usage and has its own special grammar. (Riffaterre: 1978). Literary translation must reflect the imaginative, intellectual and intuitive writing of the author. That is why the main task of the translator is to reproduce the rhetorical and aesthetic value of a poem. (Landers, 2001) A poem gives rise to multiple interpretations. The first task of a poetry translator is to produce a living rhythm, without thinking of imitating or restoring that of his foreign model. A poem is created in a specific society or culture

with objects, symbols and ideas which have a different function in another society and culture. Idioms, images and poetic metaphors are deeply rooted in culture, which are therefore the literary and aesthetic outcomes of a language.

To translate them from English to Igbo is a very difficult task. The translator of an English poem into Igbo is therefore faced with problems of meaning and style; structure, rhyme, meter and stanza, poet tone and retain the contextual meaning of the source language in the target language. The dilemma of a translator from English to Igbo is above all, how to represent as precisely as possible these characteristics in his translation and at the same time have the same aesthetic effect. In addition to retaining these characteristics, the translator is required to produce a text which is also a poem in the target language.

The purpose of our work is to translate the two English poems *My Mother* by Ann Taylor and *Rain* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow into Igbo, while as much as possible retaining the characteristics of the poem. We equally analyze the source and target texts based on the structure, the problems encountered and the way forward.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

a) *Literary translation*

Literary translation is simply the translation of literary texts. A literary text is more difficult to translate than other texts typology because of its specific characteristics: flowery, aesthetic expressive, figurative etc. It is connotative and deeply rooted in culture. Literary translation lends to multiple translations.

b) *Poetry*

Poetry is the imaginative expression of strong feeling, flowery and often loaded with imagery. Poetry is the rhythmic, inevitably narrative movement from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision. (Dylan: 1994). According to Raffel (1988), a poem "represents writing in its most compact, condensed and heightened form, in which a language is predominantly connotative rather than denotative, in which the context and form are inseparably linked. It is also informed by a musical mode". Pratima (2012) agrees with Raffel that a poem is known by its musical code. Poetry is filled with meaningful words and that, the meaning of these words can be interpreted based on various points of view.

c) *Culture*

Thriveni (2002) defines culture as “a kind of complexity. It includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom and some habits formed by living in a certain society”. Culture is central to language, it is the way of life of a people. The two are closely knit together. Culture is a way of life and language is an extension of it. We should note that in translation, a relationship is established between two cultures, translation is thus translating cultures.

d) *Characteristics of a poem*

Each field of translation has its own peculiarity, and these peculiarities make the translation of a poem very difficult. A poem consists of form and meaning. The meaning of a poem is therefore realized by both form and meaning. Rhythm, sound and rhyme constitute form, while lexical and stylistic elements constitute meaning. Rhythm is represented by the meter which in turn is influenced by stress in a certain language. Sound also plays a very important role as it is closely related to linguistic characteristics. All these put together comprise the aesthetic nature of a poem. The aesthetic values according to Newmark (1981), “are dependent on the structure (or poetic structure), metaphor, and sound. Sound is anything connected with sound cultivation, including rhyme, rhythm, assonance, onomatopoeia etc. It is difficult to find an equivalent in a target language which evokes the same image, that is to say, the same connotation and denotation in the reader of the target culture as in the reader of the source culture.

III. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND IGBO LANGUAGES

The two belong to different language families and there is a wide gap between them. Baker, (1992) stressing the importance of knowing the differences between languages notes that, “*translators should find it useful to investigate and compare the expression of such categories and meanings associated with various structures in their source and target languages*”. The English language is more advanced than the Igbo language. Both have their particular ways of expressions. Their perception of the world is completely different and therefore, have different cultures. The structural and lexical differences between languages could pose a great problem to the translator. That is why we are giving a brief comparison of English and Igbo languages. Below are some differences between the languages:

Igbo language has 36 letters of the alphabet which represent the sounds of standard Igbo while English has 24. The 36 letters are always written in alphabetical order with the simple letters (monographs) placed before the double ones (digraphs) and the ones without dots placed before the dotted ones. (Onukawa, 2011:7). The Igbo alphabet is made of vowels and consonants just like in English

language, but with differences. Igbo has 28 consonants and 8 vowels, while English language has 31 consonants and 5 vowels. The Igbo vowels is further divided into heavy (e i o u) and light vowels (a i o u). The dots are very important in Igbo language to avoid ambiguity in meanings of words that are alike.

Igbo is tone language. Tones are necessary in Igbo to indicate the correct pronunciations and meanings of every word, phrase or sentence. They help to disambiguate words which are otherwise alike. It is also a sentential and descriptive language. While English has specific term for a concept, Igbo language, most times describes a concept with a sentence. (Ijioma: 2018).

Igbo language operates a centrifugal syntax while English operates a centripetal. This implies that the qualifiers and determiners come quite often after the noun in Igbo. (Ijioma: op.cit).

IV. METHODOLOGY

Many theorists have proposed different theories of translating poetry. Schulte (1992) advocates the method of multiple translations. The reason being that, since the exact equivalents cannot be established for the transferal of poetic texts. Each translator can now highlight specific aspects provided the purpose is achieved. Lefevere (1977) proposed the following approaches to translation: phonemic; literal; metrical; poetry into prose; rhymed; blank verse; interpretation or imitation. We are of the view that translation strategies to be employed in any translation depend on the texts, the purpose, the audience, the environment. Many approaches may come into play in a text, no one is sacrosanct. The main aim of translation is to render a text that has the same effect of the source in the target text. And in the case of poetry, we are of the opinion that a poem should be translated into a poem, staying faithful to the poetic devices as far as the target language allows.

a) *Sources of Data*

The two poems *My Mother* by Ann Taylor published in 1807 and *Rain* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1842.

b) *Data Presentation*

The two poems are presented in two columns, the source text in English in the first column, while the Igbo translated version is in the second.

ORIGINAL TEXT (ENGLISH)	TRANSLATED TEXT(IGBO)
MY MOTHER	NNE M ỌMA
Who sat and watched my infant head When sleeping on my cradle bed, And tears of sweet affection shed? My mother	Onye chekwara m, nọgidem na nwata Mgbe m na-ehi ụra n'akwa nta Anyanwụ mmiri ihunanya na-agba ya? Ọ bụ Nne m ọma.
When pain and sickness made me cry, Who gazed upon my heavy eye, And wept for fear that I should die? My mother	Mgbe ahụ mgbu na-ọria mere m bee akwa Onye negidere m anyanwụ mgbe m nọ n'ahụ-mgbu Bee akwa ka m ghara ịnwa? Ọ bụ Nne m ọma.
Who taught my infant lips to pray? And love God's holy book and day And walk in wisdom's pleasant way? My mother?	Onye kuziri m ikpe ekpere na nwata Na-igụ akwụkwọ nsọ mgbe nile Na-igba n'ụzọ eziokwu na-amamihe? Ọ bụ Nne m ọma.
And can I ever cease to be Affectionate and kind to thee, Who wast so very kind to me, My mother?	Enweghị m ike ịkwụsịnata Igosi gị ihunanya na nleta kwesiri Gị bụ onye gosiri m nnukwu ihunanya Nne m ọma
Ah, no! the thought I cannot bear, And if God please my life to spare I hope I shall reward your care, My mother.	Mbanụ! Nke a apughị ime Ọ bụrụ na Chukwu dobe m ndụ A gam akwughachi gị ihe ọma ị mere m Nne m ọma.
When thou art feeble, old, and grey, My healthy arm shall be thy stay, And I will soothe thy pains away, My mother.	Mgbe ị mere agadi, m'adighi ike A ga m a nọgide gị A gaghị m ekwe ka ị nwee ihe mgbu Nne m ọma

Ann Taylor

Rain	Mmiri Ozizo
How beautiful is the rain! After the dust and heat, In the broad and fiery street, In the narrow lane, How beautiful is the rain!	Gini ka a ga-eji tonyere mmiri ozizo Mgbe uzuzu na- okpomoku gasiri N'okporo ụzọ nke sara mbara Ma ọ bụ n'ụzọ nke naanị ukwu na-aga Gini ka a ga-eji tonyere mmiri ozizo
How it clatters on the roofs, Like the tramp of hoof! How it gushes and struggles out From the throat of the overflowing spout! Across the window pane It pours and pours; And swift and wide, With a muddy tide, Like a river down the gutter roars The rain, the welcome rain!	Leenụ ụda ya n'elu ụlọ Ọ na-akpọtụ ka nzo ukwu anyinya Ọ na-ekwoputa woro woro Ka ihe na-awuputa n'akpịrị anụ kwụ chim N'elu mpio nke ahụ aja Ọ na-ekwo woro woro N'ike n'ike Ya na mmiri ụrọ dị ka osimiri na-ekwo n'oke olu na ọwa mmiri Mmiri ozizo, Mmiri Igwe ka Ala, nno!

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

c) Analysis of the Data

We analyzed the translated poems based on the characteristics of a poem. Have the Igbo versions maintained these characteristics? The analysis are given below under the following headings: stanza, rhyme, rhythm, figurative expressions and culture. The choice of words reflect the expressions used in the target language in which the speaker lives. (Bellos: 2011).

Poem 1: My Mother

Characteristics	Source Poem: My Mother	Target poem: Nne m Qma
Stanza	6 Stanzas , the same number of lines and consistent	6 Stanzas, the same number of lines but inconsistent, divergence from the source poem.
Rhyme	Rhymes: a a a b, follows an identifiable pattern, end line and consistent	There are rhymes but different for each stanza. Does not follow an identifiable pattern due to structural differences, not consistent
Rhythm	Shorter rhythms	Longer rhythms
Figurative expressions	Imagery, metaphor,	Imagery, metaphor
Culture		The title portrays the culture of Igbo people. <i>Nnem</i> in Igbo could be used for someone's mother or any female. But from the context of the poem and to portray that affection from a biological mother that carried a child in her womb for nine months and nurtured the child, we rendered the title as <i>Nnem oma</i> .

Poem 2: Rain

Characteristics	Source Poem: Rain	Target Poem: Mmiri Ozizo
Stanza	2 Stanzas of the same number of lines,	2 Stanzas of the same number of lines
Rhyme	First stanza: a b b a a Second stanza: a a b b c d e e f c, End rhyme	First stanza: a b c c a Second stanza: a b c d b c e a f g c a, End rhyme
Rhythm	Shorter rhythms	Longer rhythms because of the nature of the language.
Figurative expressions	More figurative expressions, metaphor, simile etc.	Figurative expressions but limited Metaphor, simile etc.
Culture		Mmiri Igwe ka Ala nno. This has to do with the belief of the Igbo people.

d) Challenges

We are constrained by the metrics, the syntax and the poets' ideas. The dilemma faced is how to cope with the form, the shape: number of verses, word meanings which may be connotative or denotative, the imagery, figures of speech in the target language. Will the stylistic effect be achieved? Since there are no exact equivalents in two languages, what matters is that the text in the target language expresses the meaning, sense and intention of the source text in such a way that it flows and sounds natural. It was not easy task to painstakingly find appropriate words to express the effect of the source poem in the target poem. On the challenges of poetry translation, Bellos (op. cit) opines that, "*Translation of poetry provides translators with a task that is not only difficult, but in some senses beyond translation altogether*". All hope is not lost as he further postulates that anything that can be expressed in any language can be said in another.

V. CONCLUSION

From the above, translation of poetry into indigenous languages is possible, despite the structural differences. The biggest dilemma is how to strike a balance between the semantic content and aesthetic form of the poems. We have tried as much as possible to retain the poetic structure: stanza, rhyme, rhythm,

figurative expressions, aesthetic nature and cultural aspect while transferring the meaning which is central to any translation. Newmark (op.cit) in stressing the importance of meaning opines that, "in a significant text, semantic truth is cardinal, (meaning is not more or less important, it is important. In other words, meaning is the core of any translation. The translator, therefore, should as much as possible transfer the specific values into the target language without destroying the beauty or distorting the beauty of the original poem. He should maintain as much as possible stylistic structure of the original. A literary translator, especially a poetry translator should have stylistic skills, deep cultural knowledge, be creative and imaginative.

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