

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

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Abstract

Yoru?ba? people relish in interspersing their utterances with proverbs. Hardly can a typical Yoru?ba? man or woman utter three sentences without putting in a proverb. Hence, Yoru?ba? say: ?Òwèl??in?? r?? ,?? r?? l??inòwè, b?? r?? ba? s?nu?, o?we la fi n ? wa? translated to mean that ?proverb is the vehicle through which issues are resolved. However, Yoruba proverbs are not just strung together haphazardly; they follow some particular syntactic rules of the grammar of the language. These syntactic rules give some aesthetic values to proverbs usage in the language. This paper is set to discuss the various syntactic forms that many of the Yoru?ba? proverbs manifest. We also look at the implication of the syntactic rules upon which these proverbs are hinged and how these rules are applied to structures to conform to the wellformedness condition of Yoruba grammatical sentences.

Index terms— translation, loss, gain, meaning.

1 Introduction

ifferent communities conceptualize the world they 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 conceptualize 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 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.

domestication in order to suit the needs of the

Author: e-mail: njeruwamagugu@gmail.com 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

44 souls go after death, to be "above" the earth (somewhere beyond the skies) whereas the ATS conceptualization of
45 underworld denotes a place "below" the earth. Juxtaposing Heaven against Underworld within this context can
46 be said to be functionally synonymous but the referents, above and below are opposites. Such are the complexities
47 that surround languages and culture.

48 Translation as a practice often deals with the transference of meanings in texts from one language into (an)other
49 language(s). As stated earlier, the lack of linguistic and cultural equivalents makes this a daunting task to
50 accomplish. As Van Dijk (1977) points out, texts are defined and bound by the cultural and linguistic contexts
51 within which they are produced. Any attempts to translate such texts therefore requires that the translator
52 interprets the context involved correctly and to adapt/ recreate this context to suit the function of the translated
53 text and the target audience. This is key if the rendering in the translation is to be considered acceptable and
54 by extension to be good. In this paper, I seek to build an understanding of these constraints in translation as well
55 as explore how they affect the process of translation with regard to loss and gain. The analysis carried out is
56 hinged on the thoughts of Nord (1997) on the functional approach to translation. In defense of translators, the
57 paper aims at bringing to the fore the intricacies of language and by extension of translation and communication.

58 II. Loss and Gain in Translation: A Functional Understanding

59 Nord (ibid) explains that communication involves use of signs; verbal and nonverbal, which are associated with
60 a concept or meaning by the producer, receiver or both. In translation, written signs dominate in the intercultural
61 communication that is at the core of the translation process. The producers (translators) and the receivers (TT
62 audience) must have some kind of agreement about the meaning of the signs used. Lack of agreement on the signs
63 used and the concepts results in errors in terms of 4 mistranslation or 5 4 An error of mistranslation occurs when
64 the signs used in the TT do not represent the senses contained in the signs used in the ST. 5 Missed translation
65 results from omissions that affect the cohesion and the communicative ability of the TT. missed translation.

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

71 John married Jane This however is not acceptable in Kiswahili and many other African languages where it
72 is perceived that only the man has the power to perform the action of marrying and thus the only acceptable
73 translations for these sentences in Swahili will be Jane aliolewa na John (Jane got married to John) John alimuoa
74 Jane (John Married Jane)

75 Translation scholars concur that every translation involves an aspect of loss and or gain. In this paper, the
76 argument is not centered on the semantic loss or gain, rather it seeks to underpin the complexity of the losses
77 and or gains in translations by establishing the construct of a word within a language. ...when philosophy is
78 translated into another language; instead of loss, there is transformation. Instead of reduction there is Creation.

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

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

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

101 As Kahiga (2014) posits in discussing philosophy of language, there is a mutual interdependence between
102 words, sentences and meaning. These aspects within linguistics are best understood within semantics by looking
103 at the relationship between symbols (syntax), their relationship to concepts (semantics) and their relationship to
104 things other than symbols (pragmatics). The symbols that constitute any language are, among others, words 6
105 Foreignization refers to the process of transposing foreign cultural and culturally bound linguistic elements onto
106 the TL such that the TT reads as a foreign text.

107 In discussing philosophy in translation, Young (2014:41) highlights the gains experienced by indicating that:
108 formed and agreed upon to be used within a particular language community and understood by the users
109 primarily in the process of communication. In translation, not only is a translator tasked with the transference
110 of meanings from ST to the TT, but also is expected and required to choose symbols that can best represent the
111 information contained in the ST within the TL system.

112 In translation, the debate over what is paramount between the word used in a text and the senses contained in
113 the particular word dates back to Horace and Cicero. However, over the years, scholars concur that the sense is
114 more important especially when taking translation to be a communicative and a purposeful activity (Newmark,
115 1988;Nida & Taber (1969); ??eiss & Vermeer, 1984;Nord, 1997 ?? Munday 2006). Any effort in understanding
116 the issue of loss and gain in translation however needs to incorporate both the words and senses in a text more
117 so the words, semantic meanings as well as the pragmatic meanings in the text. Words used in different context
118 evoke different senses. Therefore, understanding the renderings within any translation dictates the inclusion of
119 context in interpreting the signs and the senses within.

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

124 2 III. Loss and Gain in the Translation of Beasts of England in 125 Animal farm into Swahili

126 In this section I analyze loss and gain within an actual translation. I cite examples from the translation of "The
127 Beasts of England" in George Orwell's Animal Farm (1945:6-7) into Kiswahili "Ndugu zangu e Wanyama" by
128 Fortunatus Kawegere (1967:14-15). This song is important in the novel since it is the rallying call for the animal
129 uprising that results in the overthrow of Mr. Jones (The tyrant human beings) from The Manor Farm. This
130 ushers in the major conflict within the novel; the antagonism amongst the animals themselves. Its translation
131 therefore is key in signaling the approach taken by the translator as well as in ensuring that the TT operates at
132 the same level with the ST functionally and communicatively a) Semantic Versus Pragmatic Meaning ??ewmark
133 (1982) in discussing semantic translation avers that it attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic
134 structures of the Target Language (TL) allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original. We can further argue
135 that semantic translation is thus limited to the efforts of transposing semantic meanings of the text in the TL.
136 These meanings are the basic senses of the words used in a text and are often the senses captured in dictionaries.
137 Although a semantic translation is accurate, Newmark (ibid) argues that it may not communicate well. Again it
138 appears to be limited to the existence of semantic equivalents between the ST and the TL which as stated earlier
139 is a mirage. However, despite this major shortfall, semantic meanings within a text is often the point of departure
140 in a translators bid to correctly interpret texts. Therefore, one cannot overlook this meaning in totality. Rather,
141 once the semantic meaning of a word is established, it is the translator's task to analyze the way a specific word
142 or phrase has been used within a text. This ushers in the pragmatic level of meaning which is concerned with
143 studying the ways in which context contributes to meaning. Therefore, the translator drawing from the context
144 of use; be it linguistic, cultural or even historical, is able to arrive at the correct interpretation of a word within
145 a text. It helps ensure that the sense transferred captures the thought intended by the author of the ST.

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

152 3 b) Semantic and Communicative Gains and Loss

153 This section discusses gains within the translation in focus citing practical examples both at the semantic and
154 the communicative levels. For example, the title ST: The Beasts of EnglandHas been translated as; TT: Ndugu
155 zangu e Wanyama Semantically, this translation is not equivalent. One may argue that it doesn't render the
156 senses detailed in the ST. For instance, the word England has been omitted in the translation. However,
157 communicatively, the TT functions at the same level as the ST. Going by the historical context of the ST, the
158 novel Animal Farm, is set in the context of today's United Kingdom (UK) which consists of England, Scotland,
159 Wales and Northern Ireland. The Capital of UK is London which is in England. Therefore, the choice of "Beasts
160 of England" Could be seen as symbolic to include all constituents of the greater UK. The Kiswahili translation
161 is produced by Fortunatus Kawegere, a Tanzanian. However, Kiswahili is a language that is used beyond the
162 Tanzanian borders in countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and other countries of the East and Central
163 Africa. The translation provided in Kiswahili as "Ndugu" literally could be used to mean brethren, Citizen or
164 friend. This could be seen to operate at the same level as the use of England in the ST where in the original;
165 all constituents are united politically whereas the referents in the Kiswahili version are united linguistically.
166 This choice therefore if interpreted within the narrow confines of semantics results in a loss but when analyzed

167 communicatively, it passes for a creative communicative rendering that seeks to attain an equivalent effect on the
168 target audience hence a gain. Looking at the translation of the phrase; ST: Soon or late the day is coming Tyrant
169 man shall fall And the fruitful fields of England Shall be trod by beasts alone TT: Binadamu atakwisha Shamba
170 zote za Matunda Zitakuwa za wanyama Siku hiyo ya furaha The translator reorganizes the stanza where the first
171 line of the ST becomes the last of the TT. This rearrangement doesn't affect the meaning and communicative
172 ability of the phrase. However, looking at the translation provided for the lines ST: Tyrant man shall fall

173 4 And the fruitful fields of England

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

183 Another instance of loss and gain within this translation is manifest in the translation provided for the following
184 phrase: ST: For that day we all must labour Though we die before it break;

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

201 5 IV.

202 6 Conclusion

203 This paper examined the aspect of loss and gain in translation with a view of expounding on its complexity.
204 Other than providing general observations on these phenomena, the paper has provided a practical analysis as
205 a supplement to illustrate the preceding discourse. From the analysis, it is evident that what may appear as a
206 loss, more so semantically, may actually be a gain, communicatively and functionally, aimed at providing the
207 efficacy and vividness that the target audience can identify with and comprehend. Although there are instances
208 of loss due to the translators' shortfalls, the ability to render the thoughts and senses intended in the ST in an
209 'equivalent' manner is a daunting task that requires the translator to be creative and dynamic. The dynamism
210 is what vindicates translators against being labeled traitors especially while dealing with the ever fluid meanings
211 of words. ¹

¹A 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.



Figure 1: 3

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