

Skopos Theory and The French Adaptation of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* as *L'Ivrogne dans la Brousse*.

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Abstract

Taking a functionalist approach to translation, translators choose their translation strategies according to the purpose or function the translated text is intended to fulfill for the target audience. This paper attempts to interrogate the application of Skopos-theory concepts to the adaptation of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and his Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads' Town* by Amos Tutuola as *L'ivrogne dans la brousse* by Raymond Queneau. It also aims at proving the possibility of translating a text according to a specific objective. In order to facilitate our discussion, we will use the Skopos theory in analysing the French version of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. This paper concludes that some elements of Skopos theory were made manifest in the adaptation of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and that the translation of the novel was made by the standards of Skopos theory.

Introduction

There are several definitions of translation as there are several linguists and translation studies. Each linguist defines translation according to the theory he or she supports. Traditional approaches to translation usually view translations as being a reproduction of an existing source text, where "the source text" is the main yardstick governing the translator's decisions. According to Rey, translation is:

La transformation d'un texte dans une langue source en une autre langue capable de reproduire sur le lecteur ou destinataire tous les effets informatifs, affectifs et effectifs du texte de départ. (Rey 1973: 20)

The transformation of a text in a source language into another language which is capable of reproducing on the reader all the effective, informative and affective effects of the original text. (My translation)

The features of this definition include the message, the style of the author, the culture as well as pragmatic aspects of the text. Translation is viewed as an "act or process of rendering

what is expressed in one language or set of symbols by means of another language or set of symbols" (Snell-Hornby 1998: 39). A definition such as this will generally be accepted as a simple explanation of what the activity of translation entails. However, the scope of literary translation has gone beyond just linguistic codes as translation is being viewed as a process of cultural transfer, rather than linguistic transfer. In translation, the translator deals with a source text produced under a set of source-culture conditions for a source-culture audience. It is obvious that in order to make a source-culture text work in a target-culture situation, the translator's activity involves more than just a "replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent material in another language (TL)" (Catford, 1965: 27).

A number of scholars have made mention that the French version of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is more of an adaptation than a translation. (See Asobele 1989; Ade Ojo 1986). Adaptation is described as a procedure which can be used whenever the context referred to in the original text does not exist in the culture of the target text, thereby necessitating some form of re-creation. In this work, we wish to interrogate the French version of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* as an adaptation of the English version. Emphasis will be placed on the cultural, stylistic, semantic adaptation approaches adopted by the translator.

According to Vermeer, the source text and the target text may differ from each other not only in the formulation and distribution of content, but also in their respective goals. What is significant is that there is a relationship between the source text (ST) and target text (TT). There must be an inter-textual coherence between the source text and the target text, which is similar to the fidelity to the source texts. At first glance, the adaptation of the title of the novel *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and his Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads' Town* simply translated as *L'Ivrogne dans la Brousse* is already a step in the visualized objective of this adaptation. Keeping in mind that the whole story of the novel took place in the bush with the "drinkard" seeking his dead palm-wine tapster, the translator preferred to focus on the exact topic.

As research methodology, we would be attempting to do a comparative analysis of the two novels, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and *L'Ivrogne dans la Brousse*. (1953). With Skopos Theory as a theoretical basis, our analysis will be on some selected phrases in the source text and the target text. It will enable us to discover whether the translation of the novel was made voluntarily or involuntarily by the standards of the Skopos theory.

Skopos Theory and Translation

The main objective of a theory of translation is to recommend an appropriate method of translation for different categories of texts. In addition, it provides an array of principles, rules and information to narrow the translation of texts, facilitates the review of translated texts and also a basis for solving the problems of translation. According to functional theories of translation, translating is regarded as a purposeful activity. This means that a translation process is not something that just happens but a communicative action carried out by an expert in intercultural communication (the translator), playing the role of a text producer and aiming at some communicative purpose. *Skopos* is a Greek word meaning "purpose" or "intention" or "goal".

It was introduced during the 70's in the domain of translation by German theorists Hans Vermeer and Katrina Reiss as a technical term for the purpose of the target text and the translation activity. Skopos is a deliberate effort to distance oneself from the original and this is achieved by the changes made to reveal what is actually hidden in the original. It is a framework which combines the ideas of translation as a purposeful action and intercultural communication. "Any action has an aim, a purpose. The word skopos, then, is a technical term for the aim or purpose of a translation. Further: an action leads to a result, a new situation or event, and possible to a new object (Nord 1997: 12).

In Skopos theory, the process of translation is determined by the function of the product. This function is specified by the addressee. This theory is the core theory behind modern functionalist approaches to translation, and its aim is to dethrone the source text (ST). This is done by emphasizing the role of the translator as a creator of the target text (TT) and giving priority to purpose (skopos) of producing the target text (TT). Functionalism is a major shift from a linguistic equivalence to functional appropriateness. Thus, translation is considered primarily as a process of intercultural communication whose end product is a text which has the ability to function appropriately in specific situations and context of use (Schaffner 1998a: 3).

The main idea of skopos theory could be paraphrased as the way translation purpose justifies the translation procedures. Taking a "skopos-oriented" approach to translation means that translators choose their translation strategies according to the purpose or function that the translated text is intended to fulfil for the target audience. The goal of the translator is to render in a more coherent and interesting manner the situations of the original text for the benefit of the readers of the translated text. Vermeer (2000: 223) postulates that every action has a purpose and therefore, translation can also have a specific and defined purpose. He equally points out that the purpose of the original text may not be the purpose of its translation. He also lends credence to this when he states that "the original text and the target text may differ from each other not only in the formulation and distribution of content, but also in their respective goals, which determine how the content is arranged." In other words, the Skopos theory focuses primarily on the purpose of the translation, which determines the methods and strategies to use in translation in order to reach a functionally adequate result (Vermeer 2000: 100). To arrive at the desired goal, he recommends certain steps which includes that the translator should not engage in word for word translation; the translation must be coherent and also must be oriented towards the interest of the receptors.

The skopos rule shows that a translational action is determined by its skopos. That is to say, 'the end justifies the means' (Reiss and Vermeer 1984: 101). Furthermore, Vermeer explains the Skopos rule as follows (cited and translated by Nord 1997: 29):

Each text is produced for a given purpose and should serve this purpose. The skopos rule thus reads as follows: translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation to function in the situation it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function.

Vermeer's Skopos theory contributed a lot to translation studies. It moves beyond the traditional linguistic typologies of translation. According to his understanding, translation is no longer considered a merely linguistic process, but a purposeful action. Functionalist theories (skopos) give the translator more freedom and simultaneously more responsibility. In a situation like this the translator becomes the author of the target text and is freed from the "limitations and restrictions imposed by a narrowly defined concept of loyalty (fidelity) to the source text alone" (Schaffner 1998b: 238).

The Concept of Adaptation

Adaptation is a process of translation that substitutes a cultural reality with another cultural reality of the source language. This is a special case of equivalence that allows the translator to create or identify another situation in case it does not exist in the target language.

According to Sanders (2006: 26), an adaptation will usually contain omissions, rewritings, maybe additions, but will still be recognized as the work of the original author, where the original point of enunciation remains. Adaptation may be understood as a set of translative operations which result in a text that is not accepted as a translation but is nevertheless recognized as representing a source text of about the same length.

As a translation technique, it can be defined in a technical and objective way. The best-known definition is that of Vinay and Darbelnet (1977: 52):

La limite extrême de la traduction ; il s'applique à des cas où la situation à laquelle le message se réfère n'existe pas dans la langue d'arrivée, et doit être créé par rapport à une autre situation, que l'on juge équivalente.

The extreme limit of translation; it applies to the case or the situation in which the referent does not exist in the target language, and must be created in relation to another situation that is considered equivalent. (My translation)

Adaptation is described as a procedure which can be used whenever the context referred to in the original text does not exist in the culture of the target text, thereby necessitating some form of re-creation. This widely accepted definition views adaptation as a procedure employed to achieve an equivalence of situations wherever cultural mismatches are encountered. Simply put, adaptation is the expression of a sense to restore a communicative balance broken by the translation process. Whenever a translator chooses to alter or adapt a text to his readers, the text would usually be modified to the needs and requirements of the target audience. Adaptation helps to solve the problems of cultural untranslability in literary texts. It carries out a translation oriented towards the target language, which puts the reader of the translation in his own culture. As a local procedure, adaptation may be applied to isolated parts of the text in order to deal with specific differences between the language or culture of the source text and that of the target text. In this case, the use of adaptation as a technique will have a limited effect on the text as a whole, provided the overall coherence of the source text is preserved. As a global procedure, adaptation may be applied to the text as a whole. The decision to carry out a global adaptation

drunkard owing to the fact that Palm wine is an alcoholic drink made from fermented palm sap. The word “tapster” is a mere fabrication of the Nigerian author which the translator adapted to an expression used in Congo to express a Palm wine tapper. Raymond Queneau’s preface to the translated work reads thus:

Un palmwine tapster est un « tireur de palme ». J’ai traduit cette expression par « *malafoutier* », bien que ce mot soit employé au Congo et non en Afrique occidentale. « Gris-gris » est pour juju et « feticheur » pour juju-man.
(preface page)

The translator also adapted expressions of measurements and monetary symbols to the French culture as illustrated in the following examples.

Example 1:

PWD: So my father gave me a palm-tree farm which was nine miles square and it contained 560,000 palm-trees... (7)

IDB: Mon père me donne donc une plantation de palmiers de 260 hectares avec 560.000 palmiers... (10)

Example 2:

PWD: When I travelled with him a distance of about twelve miles away to that market..., but when I have travelled with him a distance of about twenty-five miles away in this endless forest ..., after I had travelled with him for another fifty miles in this forest,... (26)

IDB: Je le suis pendant environ vingt kilomètres et la ..., et voila qu’après avoir parcouru avec lui environ quarante kilomètres dans cette forêt sans fin ..., après avoir fait avec lui encore quatre-vingts autres kilomètres dans la forêt,... (37-38)

In describing the beautiful “complete” gentleman, the author wrote thus:

Example 1:

PWD: As this gentleman came to the market on that day, if he had been an article or animal for sale, he would be sold at least for £2000 (two thousand pounds). (18)

IDB: Ce gentleman, tel qu’il était ce matin-là au marche, s’il avait été une marchandise ou un animal à vendre, on l’aurait vendu au moins 2.000.000 frs (deux millions francs). (27)

Example 2:

PWD: my wife was feeling overloading of this baby and if we put him on a scale by that time, he would weigh at least 28lbs;... (37)

IDB: ... ma femme se sentait vraiment surchargée avec ce bébé et, si à ce moment-là nous l’avions mis sur une balance. il aurait pesé au moins quinze kilos. (55)

The description of the huge creature was also adapted to the target language and its culture.

PWD: he was just like a giant, very huge and tall, his head resembled a big pot of about ten feet in diameter,... (104)

IDB: Sa tête ressemblait a une grosse marmite d'environ trois mètres de diamètre, ... (164)

Adaptation of Semantics

The rule of fidelity stipulates that there must be coherence between the source text and the target text and also that similarities must exist between the two once Skopos theory is applied. Queneau chose to rephrase some statements to solve the problems of ambiguity encountered or identified in the original text. In the words of Irele Abiola, Tutuola is described as an unconscious artist who expresses his spontaneous recreation in English but in the structures of the Yoruba language which provides the linguistic and cultural framework of his imagination. Irele (2001: 17). Therefore the objective of the author is different from that of the translator in that, Tutuola seeks to preserve Yoruba folktales in writing while the objective of the translator is to render the events of the original text in a more interesting and coherent manner for the benefit of his target readers. For example:

PWD: When there was no palm wine for me to drink I started to drink ordinary water which I was unable to taste before, but I did not satisfy with it as palm wine. (9)

IDB: Comme je n'avais plus de vin de palme à boire, je m'étais mis à boire de l'eau que je ne pouvais pas sentir auparavant, mais ce n'était pas comme le vin de palme, ca ne me faisait aucun plaisir. (12)

The narrator tries to express the satisfaction he usually derives from palm wine which he did not derive from ordinary water. Even though the sentence is an ungrammatical one, the translator renders the idea perfectly well in the target text by using a fixed expression of the target language.

PWD: After they had pushed us to him and gone back to the market and as the "god" could talk and I myself was "father of gods" also and I have known the secret of all "gods", so I talked to this god with a kind of voice, then he did not harm us... (46)

IDB: Après nous avoir poussés vers lui, ils retournent au marché, et, comme le « dieu » pouvait parler et que moi-même j'étais aussi le Père-Des-Dieux et que j'avais appris les secrets de tous les dieux, je m'adresse à ce dieu avec la voix qu'il fallait, alors il ne nous fait aucun mal... (70)

The phrase "so I talked to this god with a kind of voice" is ambiguous. The translator expatiates on the implied meaning and thus renders the statement clearly for the benefit of his readers. Another ambiguity was presented in the description of the curious creature.

PWD: I was about to refuse to go and find out his daughter who was taken away from the market by a curious creature, but when I remembered my name I was ashamed to refuse. (17)

IDB: Je suis sur le point de refuser de mettre à chercher sa fille qui avait été enlevée au marché par un être étrange, mais, en me souvenant de mon nom, j'ai honte de refuser (25)

The idea of a curious creature is ambiguous. One would think the creature was just being curious, while the narrator meant to portray a strange being. The translator reformulated the statement to read strange being in line with the description of "the beautiful complete gentleman".

Structural Adaptation

Before any successful translation can be done, the personal style of the author must be thoroughly understood. This includes: his choice of words and expressions and his arrangements of these language components. Words and expressions must be understood in context. According to Geoff Wisner, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* suffers from a catalogue of apparent deformities of grammar, punctuation, diction, chronology, consistency, and tone and these constitute the style of the author.

Oladele quoted in Bandia (2014: 177) thinks Tutuola has carried over Yoruba speech habits into English and writes in English as he would speak Yoruba. In fact he has simply and boldly carried across into his English prose the linguistic patterns and literary habits of his Yoruba language using English words as counters. He is basically speaking Yoruba but using English words. Tutuola is a semi-literate writer and this account for his "ungrammatical and unconventional English" (Ade Ojo 1986: 296).

Example 1:

PWD: when her father saw that she did not care to marry anybody, he gave her to a man for himself, but this lady refused totally to marry that man who was introduced to her by her father. So that her father left her to herself. (18)

IDB: ... quand son père voit qu'elle ne voulait épouser personne, il veut la marier à un homme de son choix, mais cette demoiselle refuse absolument d'épouser l'homme que lui présente son père. Alors son père la laisse libre de faire ce qui lui plaisait (à elle) (26)

Example 2:

PWD: If I return to the Skulls' hole or house, they might kill me and the forest was very dangerous travel always, again I could not go directly to the Skulls in their hole... (29)

IDB: Si je retourne dans le terrier, c'est-à-dire chez les Crânes, ils vont me tuer et que, voyager dans la forêt, c'est toujours très dangereux,... (43)

Amos Tutuola wrote in regionalized English while Raymond Queneau restituted the novel in standard French for the benefit of his receivers. Thus, the translator has adapted the literary text to another culture and language, thus allowing it to survive in that other linguistic medium.

Conclusion

It is obvious that in order to make a source-culture text work in a target-culture situation the translator's activity involves more than just a "replacement of textual material in one source language (SL) by equivalent material in another language" as Catford puts it. As the goal of translation is to ensure that the source and the target texts communicate the same message, the analysed extracts clearly show that the translator was faithful to the original on the semantic plane. The translator went over and above what is established in the novel, because some ideas expressed by the author were reformulated in a more detailed manner. These modifications, rewritings and additions, enriched the target text with information that was absent in the source text. The original point of enunciation remains and the adapted work is still recognized as the work of the original author. Based on what we have analysed, we affirm that some elements of Skopos theory were made manifest in the adaptation of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*.

With Skopos theory, these modifications and reformulations are deliberate efforts of the translator to distance himself from the original and this is achieved by the changes made to reveal the implicit meanings hidden in the original text. The translator has succeeded in rendering, in a more coherent and interesting manner, the situations of the original text for the benefit of the readers of the translated text. The translator has, with his adaptation, preserved the ideas of the source text in line with his aim, and thus recreated a piece which is more coherent and acceptable to the target audience.

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