

Re-performing African Literature: A Review of Owonibi's Translation of three Yoruba Literary works into English – *Chief Gáà, Delusion of Grandeur* and *The Tight Game*

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Abstract

Re-performance, the way works of arts are translated into another language with distinct rules and principles yet preserving the aesthetics and values of the original texts, is a major aesthetic resource used by writers to establish their perspectives on translation. Jacobson's school of descriptive translation is the theoretical framework for this review essay. The dataset include: Adébáyò Fálétí's *Basòrun Gáà*, Oládèjò Òkédìjí's *Àjà Ló lerù*, and Akínwùmí Ìsòlá's *Ó Le Kú*. This is designed to investigate the level of re-performance through linguistic equivalence and socio-cultural thematic preservation. The translation of these works from the indigenous Yoruba language to the English language, in no small measure, increases its appeal yet preserving its contextual essence and values. It featured prominently the use of structural simple sentences, functional declarative and interrogative sentences, proverbs, witty sayings, eulogy and figures of speech which were translated to have a contextual equivalence with the original texts.

Keywords: Re-Performance, Descriptive Translation, Contextual Equivalence, Context, Language Question

Introduction

The meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign, especially, a sign in which it is more fully developed¹. Translation of any sort does not only develop meaning but also preserves it. In that, the same value in one language when translated into another language is retained. The translation of African literature to a more developed language, paying attention to its indigenous aesthetics, values and norms has been termed re-performance.

The evolvement of translation as a serious academic discipline began in the early twentieth century with Russian formalism that was set to give a scientific description of literal works. Their major idea was that empirical science should be used to account for the meaning of literature. But because of the nature of literary works, the method was rather delimiting. Another school championed by Roman Jakobson called the “Moscow Linguistic Circle” evolved in 1915. Their motive was to study the specificity of literature, which led to the evolvement of the Society for the Study of Poetic Language in 1916. The two schools complementarily worked to understand the implicit principles of literature that makes literature a unique work. While the latter focused on its linguistic methodology, the other was preoccupied with its rhetorics. Both schools developed independently. For the linguistic school championed by Jakobson, a sort of formalist school saw literature as a linguistic piece and sought to study the linguistic features that made it purely so. To them, the transformational role of translation should thus be considered based on the cultural system of the original text.

History of Translation

The need for preservation of memories, cultures and traditions in the early 19th century, with the evolution of cultures and societies brought about translation. Before this time, all the theoretical approaches that developed for translation only focused on the *dos* and *don'ts* of a translator without paying attention to content, contexts and forms. Their focus was mainly on closeness to meaning in the target language. This period witnessed the general debate over the two trends in translation: the ‘word for word’ or ‘literal’ translation and the ‘sense for sense’ or ‘free’ translation. The word for word has to do with vocabulary equivalence while sense for sense is contextual. The two paramount figures of this period were Horace and Cicero. The period favoured sense for sense translation because of its in practice. The basic value of enriching the native language by means of translation lead to an emphasis placed on the aesthetic principles of the Target Language(TL) product rather than the

1 Roman Jakobson. “On linguistic Aspects of Translation.” In Achilles Fang et al. *On Translation*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1959) 232-39.

slavish concept of ‘fidelity’². Cicero holds that in rendering translation as literal, the product will be uncouth, and if it is, otherwise, necessary, then something in the order or wording should be changed³. Likewise, Horace reiterating Cicero’s view, advise translators not to worry about rendering literal, faithful translation, rather use sense for sense translation⁴. Jakobson, who championed the descriptive translation classified translation into three kinds: intralingual, interlingual and inter-semiotic. Interlingual translation is translation between two languages. He considers equivalence and linguistic meaning as the main concerns of Interlingual translation. In order to achieve meaning-balance, the current study employs translation as a necessary tool for transmitting and preserving culture. Thus, the interlingual translation is deployed.

Language Question in African Literature

Whenever the issue of language to be used in capturing ideas of African literatures comes up, an exclusively variety of opinions come up with the tendency of seeing the African languages as indigenous and, therefore, not universal. It is thus germane to state areas in which African writers writing in their indigenous African languages have promoted and preserved the African culture and tradition. “Literature is inconceivable outside the context of language.”⁵ The language of African literature, though not peculiar to, it in that, others assumed African writers who are of western origins have written about Africa: colonialism, the barbaric culture and nature, communal living and so on, but could not rightly capture the essence of the tradition because of their estranged root. This school of thought is termed the Universalist opinion which gives prominence to the legitimacy of literature in African languages but does not limit itself to the belief that African literature consists of only those works written in African languages. This school is championed by such writers and critics as: Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ama Ata Aidoo, Zaynab Alkali and Abiola Irele, among others. To these individuals, African literatures written in European languages are historically legitimate and enriches both the languages and the literature itself. To this group, African writers writing in European languages “appear to have greater task of having to be highly competent in these languages in order to tell essentially African stories”. However, the indigenous knowledge and folkloric tradition is lost.

2 S. Bassnett, “Culture and translation,” In S. Bassnett, P. Kuhiwczak & K. Littau (eds.), *A Companion to Translation Studies*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, (2007) 13–23.

3 E. A. Nida, and C. R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969).

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5 D. Jacques. “What is a “relevant” translation?” In L. Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2004) 423–46.

The beauty of African literature written in its native tongue is given life by Ìṣòlá in his July 24, 2006 interview published two years later in the volume “Emerging Perspectives on Akinwúmi Ìṣòlá” edited by Akínymí and Fálòlá (2008: 429 – 452). In the interview, Ìṣòlá made it clear that:

Literature has existed in all societies, including Yorùbá, for a long time. Moreover, literature is, primarily, about a particular society, a particular language. You cannot talk about literature without talking about language because literature specifically find expression in a particular language. The first of the duties of a writer, therefore, is to cater for that particular language—the mother tongue. I said it in my article in *Research in African Literature* that there is what I consider a “cultural ecosystem” just like the bio-ecosystem. There are so many aspects of culture: the legal aspect, the literary, the religious, and many other aspects. However, it is language that organizes everything. You cannot discuss any aspect of culture without using the language. Therefore, language is strategically located at the center of culture. So, literature is part of that ecosystem, it is at the center to monitor what happens everywhere. Therefore, it is only through language that literature can rejuvenate, regenerate, organize and set things right in the culture. If you are English or Japanese, it is the language that you speak that would determine what sort of literature you will write and in what language to write it. Only the mother tongue can tell you what to do and how to do it correctly.⁶

Isola succinctly explains that the African native language better captures the thematic preoccupations of the African social milieu, and gives credence to translation which can help showcase the African works worldwide. This incidentally corroborates the work on *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Premising the cultural values and the intimate and formative experiences of their speakers must undergo a few scaffoldings. These consist of removal of the colonial stigma, restoration of their literary viability and revival through new literary works. To this group of thinkers, the African population will be able to read, eager to connect, and excited to consume the produced literature that they will perceive as closer and relevant to their existence though in a more global language which Achebe termed nativisation of the English language. Nevertheless, writing in indigenous languages alone is not enough in order for use of the African languages to be meaningful. African writers writing in these languages must extend their interest areas outside realm of literary creations. These areas include the struggle to give indigenous African languages a respectable standing in national ideological systems

6 A. Akinyemi and T. Falola (Eds.) *Emerging Perspectives on Akinwumi Isola*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2008) 495.

such as education. What use is it to write in Bambara, Gikuyu, Hausa, Swahili, or Yorùbá when majority of the audience the writer needs to address cannot read? To address this, we must follow the model provided by Akínwùmi Ìṣòlá in the promotion of Yorùbá and other African languages. We must continue to study Yorùbá language (its structure), use it in our writing (academic and non-academic), teach it to both first language and foreign language learners, and do all the best we can to promote the language.

In an attempt to fully grasp the meaning of three literary texts of prolific African writers written in the indigenous Yorùbá language, the award-winning scholar, Owonibi, considers the school of thoughts championed by Chinua Achebe - that the English language can be nativised in order to capture the very essence of the African thought and that of wa Thiong'o - that for the African culture to be sustained, there is the need to continue to write in the indigenous African languages with the support of vast Africans willing to translate African literature from indigenous languages to foreign and universal languages for an international audience. Thus, Owonibi nativised the English language in order to get an equivalent contextual translation of three texts: Adébáyò Fálétí's *Basòrun Gáà* (1976), Oládèjò Òkédíjì's *Àjà Ló lerù* (1969), Akínwùmi Ìṣòlá's *Ó Le Kú* (1974) translated as *Chief Gáà, Delusion of Grandeur and The Tight Game*, respectively. Because a full equivalence translation is almost impossible as a result of the difference in grammar and culture of the original texts. To this end, Owonibi, a vast scholar in both indigenous Yoruba and English languages has attempted a contextual translation to cater for the values of the African culture. These are most evidently significant in his poise to capture meanings of proverbs, short sentences, eulogies and figures of speech (sarcasm, metaphor, simile and personification) and wise sayings.

Literature review

African literary scholars like Ngugi wa Thiong'o⁷, and Obi Wali⁸ describe in detail how African literature cannot be separated from African culture particularly because it is what marks the difference in African literature. The signature of cultural difference exhibited by African writers to mark the significance of their works as distinct from the rest of the world include anecdotes, songs, folktales and more particularly proverbs. The use, relevance, and importance of proverbs in African literature cannot be overemphasized. African literature particularly dedicates a huge aspect of their study to the works on

7 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. "Writers in Politics: A Re-engagement with Issues of Literature and Society," *Studies in African Literature*, (Melton, UK: James Currey, an Imprint of Boydell & Brewer, 1997).

8 W. Obiajunwa, "The Dead End of African Literature". In: *The Making of a Rebel*. Carol Sicherman and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (eds.), (London, 1994).

proverbs. In African literature, through the language Yorùbá lens, literature is seen as a work of art written by Africans in African languages existed before African literature in English (or other European languages)⁹. Writing and publishing literature by Africans in Africa started much earlier and in other African languages. On November 23, 1859, the first newspaper published in Abẹ̀òkuta Ìwé Ìròhìn *fún Àwọn Ará Ègbá* àti Yorùbá. Published in both English and Yorùbá making its readership rise. In 1891, Ìwé Ìròhìn Yorùbá àti Èkó published in Yorùbá and English. The educated elites found ways to learn about what was going on in other parts of the world. Through letters to the editor, they were also able to respond and participate in ongoing civil and social debates. In 1884, many Africans wrote rejoinders to the infamous Berlin conference of 1884 which codified the demarcation of the continent. In 1928 (*The Lagos Herald*) edited by Isaac Babalola Thomas 1888-1963, journalist and writer, in 1929, wrote what has been agreed upon as ‘the first Yoruba novel’ the work *Ìtàn Ìgbésí Ayé Èmi Sẹ̀gilólá Èlẹ̀yinjú Egẹ̀ Èlẹ̀gbèrún Oko Láiyè* (*The Story of My Life; Me, Segilola, One with Delicate Eyes and a Thousands Living Husbands*) was published first as a serial, disguised as a letter to the editor by a dying old lady willing to tell her story on the newspapers. The the translation version of the book to English was published and edited by Karin Barber.¹⁰ Some other publications include religious pamphlets, poems, tracts literary works, short stories, novelettes, novels, travelogues poetry and other personal narratives, were published to limited audience literate in Yoruba and in the culture of the changing times. By the time the first notable English language novel *The Palm wine Drunkard* was published in 1952, it had a whole generation of Yoruba literary oeuvre to longingly gesture towards, and borrow from. As Tubosun rightly noted that gradually, the fame of the publishing homes that saw the light of such Yoruba indigenous writers as D.O Fagúnwà, J.F Oḍúnjò, Adébáyò Fálétí, Akínwùmi Ìṣòlá began to diminish. Today, there seems to be unpopular institution publishing Nigerian language fiction. Though there are still publications but not self-published. The literature on Yoruba translation includes but limited to Odoje (2017)¹¹ who worked on the translator’s personality in the translations. Odoje explains the person and perspectives of the translator as having an enormous impact on the translated work. Tubosun (2019)¹² worked on the fame of the Yoruba language and how translation helped to bring the interest of the Yoruba people to

9 K. Tubosun “African Literature through the Language Lens: The Yoruba example,” Asian and African studies blog. www.siue.edu/retrieved (November 2019).

10 E. A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964).

11 C. Odoje, “A Linguistic Evaluation of Yoruba-English Statistical Machine Translation.” An Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis in the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan, (2017).

12 K. Tubosun “Preserving African Languages,” www.siue.edu (15 June 2021)

limelight. His work focused on bilingualism and how well elites who are not necessarily Yoruba speakers learn about the Yoruba culture, beliefs, government and even tradition.

Some of the works of Yoruba writers whose works have been translated include: D.O Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale*(1938) translated as *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*; *Irinkerindo Ninu Igbo Elegbeje* (1940) translated as *Expedition to the Mount of Thought*; *Igbo Eledumare* (1946) translated as *The Forest of God*; *Ireke Onibodo* (1949) translated as *The Saga of the Sugarcane Man*.

This present study aims to do a re-performance of such Yoruba works as Adebayo Faleti's *Basorun Gaa* (1976), Oladejo Okediji's *Aja Lo Leru* (1969), and Akinwunmi Isola's *O Le Ku* (1974) translated as *Chief Gaa, Delusion of Grandeur* and *The Tight Game*, in order to look at the way these works are translated into the English language preserving the distinct Yoruba rules, aesthetics, values and principles. It aims to build on previous reviews on translation whose foci are on language question, interpretation and reformation of literature by investigating the level of re-performance through linguistic equivalence, context and socio-cultural thematic preservation with a view to establishing a link between re-performance, translation equivalence, and socio-cultural valuation in the texts.

Jacobson's school of descriptive translation is the theoretical framework on which the review is situated. The work also agrees with Chinua Achebe on the nativisation of the English language as a language to be adopted in writing African literature and one of Ngugi wa Thiongo's considerations for the future of African literature; "a translator willing to invest his time and talent in translating the work of literature to other languages" (1997). In order to expand the frontier of knowledge and global audience, Owonibi translated the dataset which includes a play and two novels: *Basorun Gaa*¹³, *Aja Lo Leru*,¹⁴ and *O Le Ku*¹⁵ translated as *Chief Gaa, Delusion of Grandeur* and *The Tight Game*, respectively were thus critically evaluated based on these principles. The translation of these works from the indigenous Yoruba language to the English language, in no small measure increases its appeal yet preserving its contextual essence and values. The linguistic and cultural rules of the indigenous Yoruba language structure and vocabularies were well accommodated in the translated versions. These include the grammatical levels of morpheme-word-phrase and clause. It also featured a predominant use of structural simple sentences and functional declarative and interrogative sentences. Proverbs, witty sayings, eulogy and figures of speech were translated to have a contextual equivalence with their original motifs. Most evidently African is the

13 Adebayo Faleti. *Basorun Gaa* (1976).

14 Oladejo Okediji. *Aja Loleru* (1969).

15 Akinwunmi Isola. *Ole Ku* (1974).

use of metaphoric allegory which captured significantly the socio-cultural milieu. The re-performance-based perspective of translation, through contextual equivalence, shows the strength of the works in an attempt to retain their original meaning; promote the frontier of knowledge and increase wide readership and international audience.

As a 2021 translation researcher and linguist interested in the growth, development and sustenance of the Yorùbá language in literature, Owonibi translates the works of such prolific African writers whose works provide staunch traditional leanings and culture. These include three Yorùbá language collections written well over 40 years in order to look at the thematic patterns, and cultural milieu while providing expert contextual translation for a more global audience who may want to know about African literature written in the native Yorùbá language.

Review

Owonibi presents the English versions of the data set: Oládèjò Òkédìjí 's *Àjà Lólerù* (1969), Akínwùmi *Ìṣọlá's Ó Le Kú* (1974) and Adébáyò Fálétí's *Basòrun Gáà* (1976) translated as *Chief Gaa*, *Delusion of Grandeur* and *The Tight Game* respectively. The three writers are predominant native Yoruba African literary writers who have several literary works to their credit. Owonibi in his translation wields his vast knowledge of the Yoruba and English grammar in order to achieve a vivid description and originality in narration. His versatility is evident in his ability to juggle between the two languages, showcasing the Yorùbá cultural heritage yet operating within the norms of the English syntax. His adeptness and fluidity are seasoned as he captures in a universal means the richness of the Yorùbá tradition. The answer to the age-long language question seems to have been explored by how well the translator has been able to capture the narrations. His adeptness is manifested in how well he combines Achebe's school of thought - that in order to write African literature in English, that the language has to be nativised to carry the import of the African experiences and thoughts and that of wa Thiong'o that - translation is the future of African literature written in the native language.

Delusion of Grandeur

Owonibi's dexterity in translating the detective story, *Delusion of Grandeur* (now, *Grandeur*) is beautiful. *Grandeur* is a sarcasm that has thematic preoccupations centered around corruption, god-fatherism, theft, drug and trafficking. The structure of the Yorùbá language is maintained in the work as much as the English syntax is not flouted. To achieve this, the rank scales and grammatical levels are strictly adhered to. Short sentences are used throughout the work. Evident in:

He saw no one.

He saw no animal.

The firmament was stark empty.

Lapade squatted and began to dig with his cutlass. (Pg 1)

This is done to retain the simple structure of the original Yorùbá work. Also, Contextual translation is used to account for certain witty sayings: *Èyẹ̀ ò ké bí èyẹ̀* is translated as: “Even the sky is devoid of birds.” In its transliterated form, it would have read: “A bird no longer sounds like a bird” but considering not only the linguistic import of the clause but also its situated contextual meaning. Every cultural meaning and import is linguistically catered for from the morpheme-word-phrase-clause –sentence. The structure of the sentences is also accounted for in the original Yorùbá language. Evident in:

Wasn't that what sent him to the farm that Audu Karimu now became Chief Inspector?"

The Yoruba-centric aphorism: *Şé kò kìn şe inkan tí...* is used to show the emotional state of Lapade's disappointment, seeing Audu, a non-competent police officer, ascending the rank of the superintendent. The use of textual *that* to link the two situations of the predicaments that drove him from the police service and Audu's emergence as chief is used as a causal effect *tí* - a causal adverb. And now, an adjective showing time was pragmatically used to show Audu's regret against the English grammar immediacy of time deixis.

The descriptive translation is used in capturing meanings of proverbs, parables and witty sayings. These are evident in:

Lapade walked with the *stealth* of a cat- *góló góló*.

The gentle stride of the cat is metaphorically likened to that of Lapade's movement. The word captures and paints a vivid gentle stride of the cat. Also, in

The squirrel once boasted that she had a gravity relationship with groundnuts. Whenever she waded through a groundnut nursery, the raw nuts naturally gravitated into her mouth.

The vocabularies account for not only meaning but also painted a mental picture of what played out in the garden.

Also, in:

The outlaw had nowhere but the tall tree nearby to hide; should a grown person be found drown in a cooking pot? If one was to drown, was it in a

pot? Shouldn't an adult, hunter or not, be able to differentiate an animal's footprint from humans?

The intentional loose contextual translation is made evident in the almost frozen translation of the news reports on pgs. 17 & 18, 67, 68, 162, which shows the translator's informal stylistic intention to achieve originality.

Also, the use of eulogies on pages 25, 27, 29 142 & 149 show the African value of panegyrics and link to the ancestral lineage which in turn could make one feel good.

I, Ìgírípá himself who turns a man's cutlass against him... (Pgs. 25, 27, 29 & 142)

I, Àjàó Aró, son of Láválé... (Pgs. 27, 142, 149 & 153)

Tàfá, the lion, a man of steel (Pgs. 25, 26, 27 & 29)

Also, the use of figures of speech which include: personification, metaphor and sarcasm are descriptive of the African socio-milieu. For instance the use of personification in *Delusion of Grandeur* is in style with the Yorùbá *ohùn* (evocation). The speaker addresses an invisible character:

Thanks to you breeze.

Reference to a supernatural source of bliss that plays an active role in human existence and well-being is predominantly African and is well sustained in the English language as a soliloquy. Another instance of recourse to the supernatural using personification is the intensity of the sun bearing belligerence against the actor. This is in line with the African belief that the heavenly bodies partake in the activities of mankind. The metaphoric allusions to the heavenly bodies set the tone of comparison between the breeze and the sun versus the law enforcement agents and the criminals.

The title, *Delusion of Grandeur* can be translated as an elaborate thought of erroneous belief but the translator skillfully retains *Àjà Ló Lẹrù*, leaving out the second part of the Yoruba proverb: *Iró ni pẹpẹ n pa*, as a form of suspense which later builds up to a climax. The title, *Àjà Ló Lẹrù* could be transliterated as "The rafter is the carrier of loads" but because of the translator's rich Yorùbá sense, he adds a contextual shade of meaning to complete the Yoruba sarcastic proverb *Iró ni pẹpẹ n pa; àjà ló lẹrù* (The shelf only teases: the rafter is the burden bearer). Thus, giving a befitting title, *Delusion of Grandeur*, that easily translates the intention of the original author. This is captured on the last page of the text thus: indeed, the shelf merely brags, talking about a load this heavy; it is certainly the rafter's burden."

The use of metaphor *hawk* to represent the law enforcement agent, is prominent in the work; exemplifying Africans use of symbolism. A Hawk is

popular for its clear vision to see all small animals that it preys on for food no matter how minute. This metaphor shows that no matter how swift criminals are, they are watched by the law enforcement agents and would be caught soon.

Chief Gáà

Chief Gáà is a recourse to the despotic era of Basòrun Gáà in Òyó. A play whose translation tendency in 2021 by Owonibi gave us an empirical relationship with the past. The play bears a relationship with the happening in the Nigerian political sphere today. Fálétí plays on the minds of his audience through his well-developed use of allegory. The entire play may be shortened to a moral story where an animal gave up its life for peace to reign in a society where bloodshed, inequality, power tussle, rivalry and authoritarianism thrived. The reign of Chief Gáà, the power intoxicated member of the Òyómèsi (king maker) who crowns and removes kings at will for several decades came to an abrupt end when a base of atonement presented 'itself'. Chief Gáà, single-handedly removed such kings as Onísílé, Májèèbàjé, Lábísí, Agbólúajé amongst others. He also enthroned Adégbólú, an ordinary man, a father of one with no past feats. Gáà became worried when he heard that Adégbólú, would have his daughter, Àgbònyín reign after his demise. Gáà thus began baiting him until he had the opportunity to kill the his daughter as base of his sacrifice. The metaphoric Àgbònyín (deer), which doubles as the king's daughter's name and the animal needed for Gaa's sacrifice sets the tone for the climax and the eventual fall of Gáà.

The translator retained the Yorùbá names for stylistic effect. An instance is the meeting between Àgbònyín and Gáà where Gáà refers to her as the princess but she insisted that she would want to e called Àgbònyín. The mention of the metaphoric deer joggles the brain of the power drunken Gáà and he instructs the herbalist that she be used as the base of the sacrifice for atonement as the *Ifá* has declared that a deer (Àgbònrín) was needed for it.

The original title, *Basòrun Gáà*, carries and distinguishes Gáà as an important office holder in the King making dynasty. Evident in Gáà's reference to as king in himself. This is evident in how he enthrones and dethrones kings at will. His resonance and assertive nature elucidated through his conversational turns in the text show his vigour and prowess and his daunting desire to carve an everlasting niche. In the translated version, the authority of *Gáà* was implicitly equated with the other chiefs in the rank of the Òyómèsi (kingmakers) whose duty is mere enthroneing of kings.

The theme of nature and supremacy of the Almighty is evident in the eventual paralysis and fall of Gáà. The theme of chauvinism is also manifested in the utmost secrecy with which Ìyá Mòḍe treated the request of Àgbònyín to know about the past female kings: Jomijomi, Jepojepo and Òròmpòṭò. The

eventual death of Àgbònyín sets the chauvinistic tone of the play, that the female can only fight at the background but cannot be the heroine. These themes are predominantly African.

Another theme that shows the adeptness and dexterity of the translator is that of taboo. Taboo is an exhibition or ban resulting from social customs. The translator uses euphemism which is prominently African. The translated version retains some euphemistic words that are used in the king's palace. These include:

sàlákò-hair

ìgbònsẹ̀-defecating

seater-buttock

òkínní-needle

Òpálánbá- hand

opening of calabash- a king committing suicide

There is also the use of loan words or borrowing from the Yoruba language as identified as loan, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, correspondence, and adaptation¹⁶. Words like: *orò-cult/ agbádá, dàńsíki* and *òsòròngà*. Vinay and Darbeinet explain that loans and calques are only legitimate when there is no more natural equivalence available. The use of loanwords further enriches the translation as bearing resonance to the Yoruba culture.

Panegyrics and eulogies which are predominantly African are richly used in the work. Panegyrics are expressions of praise and means of eulogizing one for something well done or for a good family name. The kings are praised by the Ologbo (cat). The cat as characterised in the play is a historian; a court dweller who has lived in the courtyard for so long and so knows the stories, traditions and history of the people and also of the kings who have ascended the throne of Oyomesi. These are evident in his praise words especially as regards Gaa. The praises bestowed on Gaa encapsulate the eulogy of not only man but the gods. Gaa is revered as a man who had dethroned and enthroned many kings. A man of strength, vigour, fame, wealth and achiever of great and numerous feats. Little wonder Gaa is referred to as "King" in his own right. All Gaa's relatives are given His honour and so well praised in his name. Not only are panegyrics used as praises, they are also used as pointers to past feats and one's ancestral lineage.

The Tight Game

Akínwùmi Ìṣòlá's *Ó Le Kú* translated to *The Tight Game* delves into the heart of culture to situate and link between African and western traditions. By weighing the strengths and weaknesses of both and carving a meeting point.

16 Vinay and Darbeinet (1958:55).

The writer uses common thematic issue of love. Within the novel, the author utilizes characters that showcase the experiences of the two traditions, Ìjàòlà the custodian of modernity, and Baba Kékeré, the custodian of tradition. These characters are not the main casts but are made the orchestrator of wisdom from whose wells the main actors draw and act. Àṣàkẹ́ and Àjàní are the main casts but act according to the dictates of the representatives of ‘their societies’.

The work has its setting in the university. The beginning of the text is a scene where ladies and young men were seen dancing and enjoying themselves. A song of tradition by Fẹ́lá was aired and quickly followed by a second song that introduces the modern culture of vanity. In a descriptive way, the youths cuddle unashamed to cater for the loss of tradition that Ishola writes about. The lyrics of the song is about the slow sales in the plantain and *moin-moin* wares, resulting to the sellers abandoning their wares and fighting.

The translation of Fẹ́lá’s song to English on pg. 1

Mi ò fẹ̀ ò/ Mi ò fẹ̀ ò rárá/Mi ò fẹ̀ ò...

I will have none of it/ I will have none of it /I will have none of it at all

The linguistic equivalence of what could have been made to read:

I will not marry you/ I will not marry you/ I will not marry you at all

This is contextually translated as:

I will have none of it

By doing a contextual translation, Owonibi uses euphemism to cover the immoral vices young maidens and men do outside the purview of marriage. For his use of euphemism, the song would have read: “I will not have sex with you/ I will not have sex with you / I will not have sex with you at all.”

Also, in describing the meetings between Àjàní and his various girlfriends, the translator is careful to use euphemism to mitigate their acts. an instance is the meeting between Àṣàkẹ́ and Àjàní.

Àjàní drew closer to Àṣàkẹ́, and they began to play.

Which could have otherwise read: “Ajani drew closer to Asake, and they began to romance.” It should be stressed that though these are not given parallel translations as per their vocabularies, the essence of the translation is maintained in that the context is given a descriptive translation.

The stringent translation of *Ó Le Kú* to *The Tight Game* does not account for the meta-pragmatic pun that was captured in the original Yorùbá version. Rather, *Tight* which could mean,

closely constrained, constricted rather than unfathomable

leaves a gap in the work. The novel, like that of Western Shakespeare's, *Romeo and Juliet*, is a scintillating narration of two lovers who seem not to be in control of their own actions but pushed around by their society. The seemingly simple and linear plot narration becomes complex when it reaches the climax. The main character, Àjàní gets confused and is at a crossroad as he has three lovers to choose from. The love story becomes sour as Àṣàké, his best of the three rejects his proposal having heard of his relationship with Lola. Àjàní in anger resolves to move on and then chooses another of his ladies. His intention to wed becomes a public notice, thus Àṣàké hears and commits suicide. Àjàní who could not contain the suicide news makes haste to reach her but had a fatal accident that claims his life. In a miraculously way, Àṣàké wakes from her coma to hear the news of Àjàní's death. The story thus ends in a tragic twist leaving Sade, the new bride broken and unstable.

The linguistic description of the events in the translated version is not only superb but also bears mental concordance with the original. The loanwords used in the characterisation are predominantly native Yorùbá words with rich cultural meanings. These include:

Àṣàké -A rare gem
 Àjàní- to be contested for
 Baba Kékeré- Uncle
 Ìjàṣà- wealth fight
 Omọṣà- child is wealth

The characterisation adds to the overall meaning of the text. Naming in Africa is important, unlike the Western belief, as noted by Williams Shakespeare in his popular play *Romeo and Juliet* (1959)¹⁷, that "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." The naming culture of Isola as preserved in the translated version gives a rich African undertone.

The overall meaning of the texts derives not only from the traditional sense of the content but also from the triadic social sense that delineates the meaning from the socio-cultural milieu of Africa to an international audience who may not understand the immediate event and settings of the themes but read it based on the universal appeal. *Basorun Gaa* is about a despotic government whose tyrannical reign was brought to an end by the death of a symbolic

17 Shakespeare, W. *Romeo and Juliet* (1959).

character. *The Tight Game* addresses the general themes of love, death and continuity. *Delusion of Grandeur* is about a detective who observed his national obligation of protecting his fellow citizenries despite his early retirement from the police. The themes and the overall content as translated to the English language have international appeal and universal relevance.

Conclusion

Writing in the indigenous native tongue alone is not enough; the struggle to give indigenous African languages a respectable standing in national and international ideological systems must be guaranteed. The aesthetics and value beauty of African literature written in indigenous African language can be translated to advanced global languages if translators are willing to give their time and talent to them; without losing the cultural identity of the tradition. This way, the culture would not only be preserved but also underscore its universal appeal, in that, writers of predominant native African literature would be assured that their works can be given wide readership by translators who could help promote the frontier.

There is therefore the need to follow not only the tradition of writing in the native mother tongues but also promote the frontier through translation and interpretation. In an interview with Isola in 1974, transcribed by Nichols in 1981, he made a succinct declaration on the language question and the translation thereof: “if one wants to get African thoughts, African culture, the African way of thinking across... it is best done in African languages. You know their language is the vehicle of culture. If you remove language, most of the things that one treasures in the cultures of the world will be half removed. *If the works are available in the original languages, then you may be able to try a translation.* But the more literature you have in African languages the more other people will want to study these languages to see the treasure you have in the literature of these (African) languages.¹⁸ Owonibi’s translation could rather be called simple and loose but descriptively and contextually sufficing to account for the import of meaning of the original versions. This sums up the works as successful.

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¹⁸ Nichols, Lee. *Conversations with African Writers*. Washington, DC. Voice of America. Steiner, George. 1975. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

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