

Repetitions in Michel Ligny's French Translation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract

The occurrence and translation of repetition are crucial in the translation process and provide insight into the practical account of translation phenomena. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a triumph of repetition in its own language. Its translation into French by Michel Ligny is a piece of effrontery. This paper analyses the translation of repetitions as part of comic, musical, symbolic and aesthetic inventory of devices in the French translation of *Things Fall Apart*. The analysis of the treatment of repetition in *Things Fall Apart* is supported by examples extracted from the original and translated versions of the text. The paper concludes that if translation of repetitions is to be anything beyond a piece of "sense data", its translation into the target language and culture should project the musical, comic, aesthetic, linguistic and cultural image in the target text.

[**Keywords:** Translation of repetitions, songs translation, replacement of repetitions, language, culture]

1. Introduction

The translation of repetition in literary texts forms a part of translation norms that operate consciously or unconsciously on the translator. Repetition reveals the relationship between textual and intertextual relations between considerations of adequacy and acceptability in literary translation. Repetitions manifest several functions depending on the genre, text types, author and text historical period. Repetitions may function as comic device in drama and poetry. The impact of repetition cannot be over-emphasized in folktales, legends, mythologies and proverbs where they serve as generic frame of reference. Repetitions have wide range of functions in poetry, where they may serve as musical, thematic or symbolic devices and "hypnotic", religious elements in sacred texts. Repetition serves as a marker with which words can be easily identified and assist in the act of memorization. It incorporates parallelism, which is frequent in proverbs and "account as a defining property brought about by various co-selections of syntax and lexis (Hisham O.2001:217).

The repetition of sound, syntax and meaning are essential devices serving to create an active participation and involvement of the listener or the reader. Repetitions of key structures function to reinforce a particular point of view in a manner which involves the reader, listener in a direct and co-creative role as

possible. Repetitions as a stylistic device are carefully designed to create coherence, produce cohesive chain in a text (ibid.:217) Repetition can function as simulator, motivator of conversations, actions and responses. They function more often than not as key to the reading and comprehension of texts. In literary translation, repetition can either be translated or avoided.

This work analyses the cases of repetitions in Michel Ligny's French translation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* rendered as *Le Monde s'effondre*. It attempts to analyse the role of repetition and stylistic norms that work against the treatment of repetition in *Things Fall Apart*. One of the persistent, inflexible norms in translation is how to avoid the translation of repetition in literary texts since the behaviour of norms is neither logical nor conscious, it seems that avoiding repetitions has to do with a deep-rooted need to display richness of vocabulary, passed down by generations of normative stylistic dos and don'ts and extremely difficult to root out (Nitsa Ben-Ari (1998)).

Chinua Achebe, an igbo cultural writer, has a unique aversion for repetition, not only of the same words but also of words of the same origin. There exist two ways of treating repetitions in literary texts. They can be omitted, avoided through the use of synonyms. Quoting Nitsa Ben-Ari (1998):

Replacing repetitions can be done in several ways, starting with a variation of the item replaced and ending with a synonymous expression, but once replaced, the result is invariably the same : normative pressures turn every texteme into a repertoreme. The persistence and weight of the norm is reflected in the fact that no text escapes it: the phenomenon is just as widespread in classical literary texts, where respect for the position of the writer in the source language could theoretically involve a greater commitment to textual relations by textual means(...) the proximity of the original should enhance adequacy.

From the above, repetitions are regarded as a universal phenomenon in literary texts. Their adequacy and acceptability in the target culture and language should constitute the preoccupation of the translator.

2. Michel Ligny as Chinua Achebe's Text (Re)producer

If translation is interpreted as a communicative and interactive linguistic activity, the role of Michel Ligny as the translator of Chinua Achebe's text becomes foregrounded as a decisive factor in determining the method of the original text. Michel Ligny decides to opt for the effective strategy in his translation of repetition and poetic discourse of the source author using literal, free translation strategies among others. In a functional approach to translation, great emphasis is laid on target language text production and on the fact that the target language text should meet the expectation of the target readers and the textual requirements of the target culture (Jakobson 1993, Neubert (1985:18), Neubert and Steeve (1992:7),

Snell-Hornby, Honig, Kussmaul and Schmidt (1998:58-60), Vincze (2004:29). Because of the communicative nature of translation, the productive aspect of Michel Ligny's translation of Chinua Achebe should be overlooked. However, during the translation of Achebe's text, the target language text is produced on the basis of the source language text.

One may ask whether this implies text production or rather text reproduction. Owing to the complexity of the translation process, Michel Ligny's translation activity of *Things Fall Apart* into French cannot be seen as a secondary activity in comparison with the text production. Since translation functions as independent, autonomous text, Ligny is expected to produce functional, "natural" text that is not different from the original text William, (2005:124). This entails a shift of focus from the original text to the target language text production. The translator is, thus, considered as the target text "author," Jakobson(1993:157). During the translation, the translator begins from the original text and he renders it into another text. The process involves both text reproduction and production. Michel Ligny's translation activity is reproduction as it relates to the production of something. At the same time, it is also production because the translator uses his creativity during the translation process in a number of areas, Krisztina K. (2008). Englund D.(2005:25-26) makes the following remark concerning translational text production:

The process of text generation in translation as manifested in writing down the translated text differs from the text generation process in monolingual writing in at least one important aspect. In translation, the topics for the text and its content, as well as many aspects of its structure, both overall and often also at sentence level, are modeled upon another text, the source text, instead of being generated by the writer from the topic of the writing assignment. However, there are also similarities, both concerning more general cognitive processes, such as the alternation between automatic processing and problem-solving and the linguistic levels or aspects processed.

The extent to which a translation may be regarded as a productive activity depends on the purpose and function of the translation as well as the type and genre of the given text. The purpose of translation can be political or humanistic. It is evident that every aspect of these purposes is an inseparable part of any culture, which follows that, cultural exchange is the basic function of translation as it is that of the language. In deciding on the relevant translation technique to the text, it is beneficial for the translator to distinguish different meanings in various texts while keeping the purpose of the translation in mind, because the purpose of any translation is the guiding principle on how the meaning of a text should be translated.

Considering the nature of translational text construction from a functional perspective, translation is seen as a dynamically changing productive and

reproductive activity (Károly K(2007). The proposition of the productive and reproductive tasks of the translator depends on the genre of the text, as well as the purpose and function of the translation. Translational text production is thus, a gradual phenomenon, which ranges from literal translation a mainly reproductive and not creative activity (Károly K (2008). From the foregoing, the actual productive and reproductive tasks of Chinua Achebe's translator are regarded as relative concepts. Klaudy (2006) identifies the translator's task regarding the seven standards of textuality proposed by de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) in the three stages of translation which are: perception, transfer and target language production. De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981:3) claim that in order to become communicative, texts must meet certain "standard of textuality". Textuality, in de Beaugrande's (1980:17) definition, refers to the status of a linguistic entity or configuration of entities as a text of a natural language. De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) provide seven standards relevant to the translation activity as: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality. Cohesion does not only refer to the grammatical structure of sentences and clauses, but it also includes the actual inter-sentential relationships that are formed between elements of the text, such as substitution, ellipsis, reference and repetition. Among these cohesive ties, only repetition will be discussed and analysed in Michel Ligny's translation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

3. Translation of Repetition in *Things Fall Apart*

Chinua Achebe makes use of repetition in his narrative text. Let us consider some of these repetitions and their translation in the target text.

- a. Go-di-di-go-di-go. Go-di-di-go-di-go (...) Dim! Dim, Dim, boomed the cannon at intervals. Di-di-go-di-di-go floated in the message laden night air(...). It began by naming the clan: Umuofia Obodo dike, the land of the brave: Umuofia Obodo dike! Umuofia Obodo dike, Umuofia Obodo dike! It said this over and over again(...)p.84
- b. Go-di-di-go-di-go. Go-di-di-go-di-go (...) Dim! Dim, Dim, tonnait le caon par intervals. Di-di-go-di-di-go flottait dans l'air nocturne chargé de messages. Il commençait par nommer le clan: Umuofia Obodo dike, "la terre des braves" Umuofia Obodo dike! Umuofia Obodo dike! Il répétait sans cesse cette phrase...p.147-148.

The above repetition is a conversation between Ekwe and the clan, a musical instrument made from wood and function to endow the conversation with credibility. It also put a distinction between the hero, Okonkwo, and other characters in the text. Michel Ligny's translation of these repetitions is adequate and acceptable in that it stimulates emotions of the target reader. His role, as Achebe's translator is a complex one. He conducts the code-switching between

two different languages and cultures that is, Igbo language and the English language before translating these repetitions into French. As a result of the translator's effort, the target reader's horizons are widened and the target language and culture and language are enriched in the target language and culture.

Michel Ligny's translation of *Things Fall Apart* has moved from behind the curtain to the forefront and it has become a visible subject from an invisible ghostly presence as the target reader's knowledge of the Igbo socio-cultural and linguistic background increases. This is a creative effort on the part of Michel Ligny as Achebe's translator. From the above, his role can no longer be considered as inferior to the original author, but it is considered a creative entity. The translation of the above words functions to retrieve the translator's lost subjectivity and his decision-making in the transfer process and participation in the creation of the literary text into the target language. His transfer of the above words also confirms that Michel Ligny is not just a passive receptor of the source text, but an active creative agent in the making of meaning.

Michel Ligny cannot be excluded from his fore-understanding structure in the complex process of interaction with the source text. Invariably, the translator feeds his own beliefs, experience and attitudes into his processing of the above texts so that his translation to some extent can reflect his own linguistic, cultural and mental outlook in spite of his role as an impartial intercultural and interlinguistic mediator and producer of a target text into a new cultural and linguistic system.

What has happened? Asked Okonkwo. Do you know Ogbuefi Ndulue? Ofoedu asked. Ogbuefi Ndulue of Ire village, "Okonkwo and Obierika said together. "He died this morning, said Ofoedu (...). This is very strange indeed, said Okonkwo(...). I did not know that, said Okonkwo(...) shook his head, doubtfully(...) Okonkwo was not a man of thought but of action...p.47-48.

Qu'est-ce qui est arrivé? Demanda Okonkwo. Connaissez-vous Ognuefi Ndulue? Demanda Ofoedu. Ogbuefi Ndulue du village d'Ire, dirent ensemble Okonkwo et Obierika. Il est mort ce matin, dit Ofoedu(...) c'est très étrange en vérité, dit Okonkwo(...). J'ignorais cela, dit Okonkwo (...). Okonkwo hocha la tête d'un air de doute(...) Okonkwo n'était pas un homme de réflexion mais d'action. Pp.84-85.

The main activity of the translation of these repetitions is the act of naming. In the text above, the repetition of name, Okonkwo is part of a set and translation norm found to operate consciously or unconsciously on the part of the translator. The translation of this name provides a generic frame of reference to the hero of the text. This, however, does not pose any problem to the translator. It is rather a symbolic name in that it marks a class in the overall characterization of the source text. Drawing inspiration from the linguistic anthropology, the translation of these

names emphasizes the non-arbitrary nature of African name (Bariki I.(2008, Agyekums, K. (2006).

4. Song Translations in *Things Fall Apart*.

Chinua Achebe makes use of songs in the composition of *Things Fall Apart*. Let us analyse a few of these songs:

a.

Who will wrestle for our village?
Okafo will wrestle for our village
Has he thrown a hundred men?
He has thrown four hundred men
Has he thrown a hundred Cats?
He has thrown four hundred Cats.
Then send him word to fight for us. p.36.

Qui luttera pour notre village
Okafo luttera pour notre village
A-t-ill terrassé cent homes?
Il a terrassé quatre cents Chats.
Alors envoyez lui dire qu'il se batte pour nous . p.66.

b.

Kotma of the ash buttocks,
He is fit to be a slave
The white man has no sense
He is fit to be a slave p.123.

Kotma aux fesses de cendres,
Il est bon pour faire un esclave,
L'homme blanc n'a pas de bon sens.
Il est bon pour faire un esclave.

c.

The rain is falling, the sun is shining,
Alone Nnadi is cooking and eating.p.25.

La pluie tombe, le soleil brille,
Tout seul, Nnadi fait la cuisine et mange p. 48

In text (a) above, the translation of repetitions of “village” “men” “Cats” “thrown” “hundred” rendered as “village” “homme” “Chats”, “terrassé” “cents” in the above songs create melody. The above song is a form of oral poetry that helps to further the understanding of the creativity of the translator and confirms that

Michel Ligny, as the subject of reception, interpretes the above songs from his own perspective while deriving information from their interpretations to make his own judgements before transferring them into the target text. Michel Ligny's translation of the above repetitions in the above songs introduces us to the vital aspect of literary translation which is recreation. Literary translation is an art of recreation and reproduction. This is evidenced in the translation of the above lexical items into French.

Recreation, with reference to the translation of the above words happens between the translator and these words. This takes place in the process of constant interaction and interpretation between the translator and the text. Since there is no self-sustained meaning of literary text owing to the relative, dynamic and endless process of interaction, it is possible for any other translator to derive several meanings in the above songs due to individual prejudice. Moreover, it is not bold to say that there is no authoritative original meaning. However, the above words and their French translations are closest equivalent occasioned by the translator's initiative. The translator gives birth to the "after-life" of the above songs through his own interpretation in the target language. Michel Ligny conveys the artistic charm and aesthetic value of Chinua Achebe in the transformation of this song.

Repetition creates sound. In text (b), the repetition and translation of the "He is fit to be a slave" rendered as "Il est bon pour faire un esclave" is both musical, symbolic and thematic device used by the aggrieved people of Umuofia to condemn the dehumanizing attitudes of the prison officials. The above song is symbolic of the strokes of the machetes of the black prisoners who were beaten in the prison and were made to cut grasses, clear government compound and fetch wood for the White Commissioner and the Court messengers. Michel Ligny transfers the poetic discourse of the song by giving special attention to the translation of expression of feelings, "He is fit to be a slave" rendered as "Il est bon pour faire un esclave". The song sets out in regular short lines making a distinctive shape in the text and their regular rhythm produces a musical effect.

Text (c) suggests a perception of reality. There is avoidance of redundancy in the French translation. The song is a condensed expression in certain forms and carries the styles, images and music as a reflection of the innermost emotion and feelings of the singer's inner mind. The image of "rain" that is "falling", "sun" that is "shining," "cooking" and "eating" produces feelings of contentment, gladness and joy from the innermost heart. The song chanted produces a picture drawn from the reality and presentation of feelings in words and forms and musical rhythm. From the above translation analysis, it is found out that song translation is not just a matter of lexical, grammatical, rhetorical and functional issues. Issues of musical effect and form are uniquely important to its successful transfer.

If I hold her hand
She says "Don't touch

If I hold her foot
 She says, “Don’t touch
 But when I hold her waist bands
 She pretends not to know. p.83.

Si je tiens la main,
 Elle dit: ne me touche pas.
 Si je lui tiens le pied
 Elle dit: ne me touche pas
 Mais quand je tiens sa ceinture de perces.
 Elle feint de l’ignorer.p.45.

In text ‘d’ above, the translation of the original corporal images of “hands”, “foot”, “waist bands” rendered into French respectively, as “la main”, “le pied”, “ceinture de perces” into the target language makes the target reader to be inspired, touched and aesthetically entertained in the same manner as one reads the original text. Apart from the bilingual proficiency and bi-cultural competence of Michel Ligny, he also demonstrates high literary insight and aesthetic sensitivity of Achebe’s oral poetry in the translation of linguistic items: “If I hold”, “If I hold.....” translated as “ si je tiens...”, si je tiens...” into the target language. If a literary text is to be anything beyond “a piece of sense data”, it must come under the control of the creativity of individual or collective subjectivity of a group.

5. Replacement of Repetitions

Let us consider instances where repetitions are replaced by another word in the text.

a. And how is my daughter, Ezinma?
 She has been very well for some time now.
 Perhaps she has come to stay.
 I think she has. How old is she now?
 She is about ten years old, I think she will stay.
 p.34.
 Et comment va ma fille, Ezinma? Elle se porte très
 bien depuis un certain temps déjà.
 Peut-être est-elle venue pour rester. Je le crois.
 Quel âge a-t-elle maintenant?
 Elle a environ dix ans. Je pense qu’elle restera. p.64.

b. But apart from the Church, the White men had also brought a government. They had built a court where the District Commissioner judged cases in ignorance. He had court messengers (...). These court messengers were greatly hated in Umuofia because they were foreigners

and also arrogant and high-handed. They were called "kotma" and because of their ash-coloured shorts they earned the additional name of Ashy-Buttocks.p.123.

Mais, à part l'église, les Blancs avaient également apporté un gouvernement. Ils avaient bâti un tribunal où le Commissaire de District jugeait les affaires dans son ignorance. Il avait des messagers de la Cour(...). Ces messagers de la Cour étaient profondément haïs à Umuofia parce qu'ils étaient étrangers en même temps qu'arrogants et brutaux. On les appelait "kotma", et à cause de leurs shorts couleur de cendre, ils méritèrent le nom supplémentaire de Fesses-Cendrées.p.211.

c. If a gang of **efulefu** decided to live in the Evil forest, it was their own affair(...). These **outcast** or **osu**, seeing that the new religion welcomed twins and such abominations, thought that it was possible that they would also be received (...). The **heathen** say you will die if you do this or that, and you are afraid (...) the heathen speak nothing. pp.110-112.

Si une bande d'**efulefu** décidait de vivre dans la Forêt Maudite, c'était leur propre affaire (...). Les **intouchables**, ou **osu**, voyant que la nouvelle religion accueillait les jumeaux et de semblables abominations, pensèrent qu'eux aussi, peut-être, ils seraient reçus (...). Les **païens** disent que vous avez peur (...). Les **païens** ne disent rien d'autres que des mensonges. Pp.187-191.

Text 'a' above is a dialogue between Ekwefi and Chielo. In this dialogue, Ezinma's name is avoided several times. Rather than repeating the name Ezinma, Ezinma in the rest of the conversation, personal pronouns are used to replace the repetition.

In text 'b', the repetition of "court messengers" translated as "messagers de la cour" is replaced with "kotma" translated as "kotma" and "Fesses-Cendrées" in the target language. In this case, only single words and a group of words are replaced. The textemic role of repetition, as used in the source text and translated by Michel Ligny, functions to introduce mockery of the court messengers of the District Commissioners. The source text mocks the arrogance and high-handedness of these court messengers. The translator transfers this subtle mockery into the target text adequately.

In "c" text above, it is a case where repetition is acknowledged but with variations. The textemic value of the words is so obvious in the source text. This allows the translator to vary the repetition of these words in the target text. Thus, "efulefu" is rendered as "efulefu", "outcasts" or "osu", which also refers to "efulefu" is translated as "les intouchables" or "osu". Likewise, the word "heathen" which refers to "efulefu" is rendered as "les païens". The above translation justifies the variation of repetition in literary text. Michel Ligny's repertoire favours the

translation of these variations thus transforming them into acceptable standardization in the target language.

6. Conclusion

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a triumph of repetition in its own language. Its translation into French by the translator is a piece of effrontery. It is important to affirm that difficulties in translating Achebe's text are enormous during its rendition. Notwithstanding, the translator is bold in the task of translating Achebe's spirit and the letter in order to give "after-life" to the target reader in French. Repetition, as part of comic, musical, symbolic inventory of devices plays a vital role in literary texts. If the translation of repetitions in literary text is to be anything beyond a piece of "sense data", its translation into the target language and culture must project the aesthetic, musical comic, linguistic and cultural image in the target text. The innovative and creative work of Michel Ligny in the treatment and translation of repetitions suggests a new path for future translation of repetitions in translation studies. Repetition is a common occurrence in all literary texts. Its translation should be adequately and acceptably carried out following the source text's stylistic normative prescription.

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