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Translating Igbo Songs into English: An Interpretative Approach

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Abstract

Translation has been chosen as a means of communication. A good translation is a means of overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers thus making it possible for communication to take place. Like in other African countries, translation from and into Nigerian languages becomes necessary not only for communication purposes, but also to fulfil two important functions. The first is cultural, the second is related to socio-economic development. Our research in this regard is more related to the cultural communication of translation. Translation is no longer seen as a linguistic exercise, but is seen more as a cultural transfer where the translator mediates between two cultures. We are in this work translating Igbo songs into English: a translation that is both cultural and literary. The Igbo language is rich in culture, translating from this language into another language showcases the Igbo culture. To translate is to communicate. The translator plays with the words of two languages: the original language in which the text to be translated is written and the language into which the text is being translated into. The translator does not keep words, as soon as he understands the meaning contained in a text, he re-expresses it into another language. He mobilizes his linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge to translate the text. Using the interpretative theory of translation, we will demonstrate that translating Igbo songs which is oral literature or orature, involves more than words.

Key words: Translation, meaning, communication, culture, oral literature, songs

Résumé

La traduction occupe de plus en plus une place de choix comme moyen de communication. Une traduction efficace constitue un moyen de surmonter les barrières linguistiques et culturelles et ainsi permettre à la communication d'atteindre son but. La traduction dans les langues nationales du Nigeria, à l'instar des autres pays africains s'est avérée nécessaire non seulement pour des besoins de communication mais également pour assurer deux fonctions essentielles. La première fonction est surtout d'ordre culturel. La seconde fonction de la traduction, est relative au développement économique et social. C'est la première fonction qui touche le plus près à l'objet de notre recherche. La traduction n'est plus perçue uniquement comme un phénomène linguistique mais de plus en plus comme un transfert culturel où le traducteur est considéré comme médiateur entre deux cultures. Notre travail ici est de traduire des chansons de la langue igbo du Nigeria en langue anglaise: une traduction à la fois littéraire et culturelle. La langue igbo est riche en culture. C'est la traduction qui pourrait apporter cette culture aux autres. Traduire c'est communiquer. Le traducteur joue avec les mots des deux langues: la langue originale et la langue vers laquelle il traduit pour pouvoir communiquer. Or, le traducteur n'est pas un gardien des mots. Dès qu'il saisit le sens dans un texte à traduire, il le ré-exprime dans une autre langue. Il mobilise ses connaissances linguistiques et extra linguistiques pour traduire le texte. En appuyant sur la théorie interprétative de la traduction (la théorie du sens) nous essayerons de démontrer que les processus de la traduction des chansons igbo qui font parties de la littérature orale implique autres que les mots.

Mots clefs: Traduction, sens, chansons, communication, culture, littérature orale

Introduction

Literature is the study of the works of other authors whether they are people of our culture or not. It can be grouped into two: oral and written literature. Chukwuma (1994, p. 47) categorized oral literature into three main headings: the prose, the song and the drama. She asserts that "literature has no equivalent translation in Igbo". This assertion is made because no particular word depicts the sum total of all the various literary forms existing in the various languages to the indigenous speakers of the Igbo language.

Abram (1981, p. 66) identified Orature as a folklore hence contends that folklore is:

The collective name applied to verbal materials and social rituals that have been handed down solely or at least primarily by word of mouth and by example rather than in written form.

It includes:

Legends superstitions, songs tales, proverbs, riddles, spells, nursery rhymes, pseudo-scientific lore about weather, plants and animals, customary activities at births, marriages and deaths, traditional dances and forms of drama which are performed on holidays or at communal gatherings.

Orature is thus an information pool as it is a means through which people are brought together to exchange experiences and information. It is a form of informal schooling as knowledge of the norms of the society is imparted to a younger generation. Folklore or oral literature thrives well in communities where few people can read and write. Abram further distinguishes three forms of folklore: folk drama, folk songs and folk tale or prose. These forms could be seen as social/cultural activities that vary from one community to another and from one country to the other. Oral literature thrives well in the villages as they are ways of socializing, entertaining and disseminating the culture of the people to the younger generation.

Let us here state that communication in the Western society is mainly through writing whereas in Africa, oral communication dominates. Our focus is on translating Igbo songs which are part of Orature or oral literature. The songs were collected from elders in the villages and others by watching children playing (song 7). The songs are from Ntigha and Ubakala communities of Abia State, Nigeria. Even though our songs are taken from parts of Abia State, we would like to state that Igbo customs are basically similar event though there might exist some local variations. If we take as example the celebration of kola nut, music, dance, ethics, ritual avoidance, taboo etc. are basically patterned to reflect the conception of Igbo social life and cultural systems.

The Igbo Language: A Brief History

The Igbo language is one of the three major languages in Nigeria. It is spoken in the states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Delta, Imo and Rivers. The Igbo language belongs to the igboid group of languages that belong to the Niger-Congo family. About 15% of the country's population speak Igbo.

Before the colonisation, the Igbos had a graphic representation of writing in form of Nsibidi which is a pictorial system of communication. The signs cover all aspects of life experience and can be seen on tombs, sculptures, pottery, masques etc. (Iscichie 1976, p. 37). Daryell (1911) quoted by Nwadike (2002: 15), compared the Nsibidi to the Hyroglyphics or the Cuniform ssystem of writing. The Nsibidi could not develop further because of its complexity. As a result, most Igbo activities were oral.

The Igbo language became object of study with the arrival of the Europeans. Schön published the book, *Vocabulary of Ibo language* (1834) which was followed with the translation of The Gospel of Matthew (1860) and that of Mark (1864). It was in 1832 that Adams wrote on grammar: *A modern Grammar of Ibo* followed in 1936 by Ward's

An Introduction to the Ibo language. Udoh's book *Ihe Ọmụmụ mbụ dị n'Ọnụọgụgu Akwụkwọ* was the first book written in Igbo. The Missionaries carried out most of the work on linguistics at this early time (Ugochukwu & Okafor 2004: 8).

Emenanjo (1995: 219) draws our attention to the struggle to standardise the Igbo language. Before the standardisation, it underwent many stages. It metamorphosed from Isuama Igbo (Schön 1852-1899), to Union Igbo (Denis 1900-1927), to Central Igbo (Ward 1929-1972). After these struggles and through the efforts of the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC), a standard Igbo emerged and was accepted.

The Igbo phonological system comprises 36 sounds: 8 vowels, 28 consonants and 9 diphthongues. The combination Consonant Vowel (CV) constitutes the basic syllabic structure. The Igbo language is a tone language.

As stated above, the Igbo language is rich in culture and this culture can only be communicated to non-Igbo speakers through translation.

Language, Communication and Culture

Language can be said to be human speech, either spoken or written. It is a means of communication. It differs from one community to another and from one country to the other. Language expresses the norms, value systems, ideas, concepts, customs and experiences of a people. It defines environment. It is the basis of man's uniqueness and the essence of his culture. Language is common to all cultures. On the other hand, culture is expressed in language. Because culture and language are linked, a language can only be understood in its cultural context. Thus, both language and culture cannot be treated in isolation or out of context.

Bellos (2011, p. 349) posits that "language is ethnicity. Ethnicity in this sense has nothing to do with lineage, heredity, race, blood group or DNA. It means: how a social group constitutes and identifies itself". In other words, one can be identified by one's language. Language is thus part of culture.

Since language is an essential component of culture, the translator has to be bilingual and bicultural to communicate. This is because different languages perceive realities of life differently. Thus, language is the expression of the cultural beliefs of the society to which it belongs. The values and norms of a society are reflected in their culture.

Communication is not purely a linguistic affair it can be said to be complex. Simply put communication is the act of transferring information from one place to another. "It is the act of conveying intended meanings from one entity or group to another through the use of mutually understood signs and semiotic rules" (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/communication>). Hence Samovar and Porter (1991, p.

28) see communication as occurring “whenever meaning is attributed to behaviour or the residue of behaviour”.

Webster online dictionary defines communication as: “the act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviors to express or exchange information or to express your ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc., to someone else”. www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communication. It can be said to be a two-way process of reaching mutual understanding.

To Hall (2002, p. 16) “communication refers to the *generation of meaning*” (italics by the author). These definitions show the multidimensional nature of communication. Thus, communication can be intentional, conscious or unconscious. To illustrate: the opinion that spectators form of a politician who speaks to them through the television is not necessarily made of linguistic signs (Baylon & Mignot 1999) but is also made up of non-linguistic signs. All that makes up meaning is communication: dressings, height, age, sex, gestures, silence etc; are all means of communication because each conveys a message.

Communication can be said to be seen as a process of transmitting thought, transmitting message and linking of people, sharing and imparting of information, conveying of ideas, attitudes and feelings. Communication and culture are linked hence “one’s cultural perceptions and experiences help determine how one sends and receives messages” (Samovar & Porter 1991, p. xii).

Intercultural communication can be seen as a communication where the speaker and the person being addressed belong to different backgrounds. Translation is an example of intercultural communication.

Culture consists of all those material and spiritual characteristics and products of the human intelligence acquired from the remote past, in the advancement of humanity. To Barclay (1986) cited by Chuta (1992, p. 20), “Culture comprises many aspects namely, language, knowledge, human institutions, technology, beliefs, traditions and customs”. Tshum (1978, p. 40) posited that culture is:

The way of life of the members of a society. It includes how they dress, their marriage, customs and family life, their patterns of work, religious ceremonies and leisure pursuits. It covers also the goods they create, bows and arrows... dwelling places.

We see culture as the way of life of a people. It is a binding force in any society. It is the way people do their things – their beliefs, custom, legend etc. Thus, the culture of a society provides answers to the problems encountered in that society. It helps people cope with the world around.

Culture can thus be expressed through language which is a means of communication. Language is thus closely related to culture and should be considered in the processes of translating a culture bound text.

Translation of Cultural Activities

To translate means to understand the meaning contained in a text and re-express such meaning. Though it is language that vehicles the meaning contained in a text, it is not the object of translation. Translation communicates through language and facilitates the spread of information and culture. It enhances knowledge, promotes understanding and co-operation between peoples and nations. Translation cannot be isolated from culture because it unites cultures. The translator should remain faithful to the source text by conveying the meaning it conveys to the target audience.

Mba (1996, p.1) sees translation as “a conscious semantic transfer of cultural items from one culture or its variety to another”. Translation thus becomes a tool for the perpetuation of culture since it makes available the cultural and artistic content of a group of people to another group. Both language and translation are vehicles of culture.

In Translation studies, translation is no longer seen as a linguistic activity but is seen as a means of cultural transfer whereby the translator is seen as a mediator between two cultures. We deem it necessary to explain the Interpretative theory since our work is based on its application to the translation of Igbo songs.

The Interpretative Theory of Translation

Danica Seleskovitch, Marianne Lederer and their counterparts at ESIT (Ecole Supérieure des Interprètes et Traducteurs), Paris, France developed the Interpretative theory (ITT) of translation also known as the theory of meaning. The theory sees translation as based on speech or on human communication in general. It lays emphasis on relating on meaning in communication. ITT is founded on the processes of interpretation, deverbalsation and reformulation or re-expression (Israël, 1990, p.37). The meaning contained in the original text has to be understood and reformulated in the second language. The translator thereby re-expresses the meaning contained in the text or the message the original author wants to communicate to the audience. Hence the translator has to remain faithful to the author. Thus, the theory upholds equivalence in translation rather than one-to-one meaning. It is this aspect that differentiates the ITT from the linguistic theory of translation. Lederer (1994, p. 51) emphasised this difference when she said that the ITT is established between texts while the linguistic theory is between linguistic elements such as words, and phrases.

In summary, the ITT expects the translator to have both the linguistic and extra-linguistic competence, to understand the message contained in the text to be translated

and re-express this meaning to deliver the intended message of the author. It is not a word-for-word translation but an equivalent translation.

The Nature of Igbo Songs

Songs feature in almost all Igbo cultural activities. In some context, songs are means of infusing a sense of pride, unity, expressing emotions, thoughts, ideas and “comments which cannot be stated boldly in normal language situation” (Ifeonu 1982, p. 45). The usage of songs is a means of validating social institutions and it serves as an agent of continuity and stability in the Igbo culture

Igbo songs are a form of oral literature and the translation falls under literary translation. Literary translation is the translation of literary works. Literary texts by nature are connotative and are not univocal. They have universal values and are timeless as they do not become out dated. They are sometimes complex and the style may pose problems for the translator. So, in translating literary texts, the translator must possess literary competence and should be creative to be able to make the intended meaning to reach the audience to which it is meant for. Hence Nida (1977) says that “the validity of any translation can be judged by the extent to which the intended receptors rightly understand the message”.

Igbo songs are poetic and the social life of the Igbo people is expressed through folklores: songs, proverbs, legends, riddles, etc. Every memorable occasion: birth, new yam festivals, moonlight nights, etc. are celebrated in Igbo by dancing, singing and merrymaking. In this direction, Equano (1974, p. 29) discussing the Igbo community says:

We are almost a nation of dancers and musicians and poets. Thus, every great event, such as triumphant return from battles, or causes of public rejoicing, is celebrated in public dances, which are accompanied with songs and music, suited to the occasion.

Of the same view is Chukwuma (1974, p. 26) who posited that songs are usually bound by the primary occasions of performance from which they derive their names e.g. birth songs, war songs, title songs” etc. The Igbo language has songs in various areas which are used as the occasion demands. These songs portray various aspects of the Igbo culture and are in fact master pieces.

Igbo songs are likened to oral poetry because they emphasize rhythm and can be accompanied by the metal gong (*ogele*), the resounding pot (*udu*), the rattles (*oyọ*), the short wooden instrument (*ekwe*), the talking drum (*ikoro*) etc. The singers can equally clap as they sing to a particular rhythm. Most songs are traditional in nature. They are rich in meaning and are meant to send messages across to the listeners. Thus, Igbo songs “are not only used for entertainment or merry making, they equally shape human

behavior, they are important and are a form of verbal communication and reflect societal values and norms” (Ogbalu 1974, p. 40). In other words, Igbo songs are meant to teach the Igbos their culture, values, morals, taboos etc. They equally express emotions and serve as corrective measures and are taken from traditional Igbo society. The songs equally depict the traditions, beliefs; customs of the Igbo people. They are imaginations and are normally oral and are transmitted from generation to generation. Our songs include social songs: war song, work song, birth song, title song, funeral song or dirge, folk song, lullaby, praise song, plea song, satiric song, moonlight play /game song, moral/counselling song.

Chukwuma (1994, pp. 35-43) identifies eight types of Igbo songs:

1. Abụ agha = war song
2. Abụ ọlụ = work song
3. Abụ nwa = birth song
4. Abụ ọzọ = title song
5. Abụ ozu = funeral song (dirge)
6. Iro iro (ie ifo ifo) = tale/folk song
7. Abụ ụmụaka = children’s song (lullabies)
8. Itu-afa = praise poem

In the cause of our investigations, we were able to identify other types of Igbo songs. These include:

9. Abụ arịrịọ = plea song
10. Abụ itụ ikpe = satiric song (indirect disparaging allusions)
11. Abụ egwuregwu = games song
12. Abụ ndụmọdụ = moral/counseling song

The examples of these songs will be seen in the section that follows.

Translation of Sample Songs and Analysis

Mattew (1959, p. 67) opined that “the original elements of any oral tradition are best preserved in the language in which such oral tradition is originally expressed” This tends to support the fact that translating oral art is not an easy task. We tried as much as we could to convey the messages contained in the songs of our choice to the English audience. We sampled each type of song. We first gave the literal meaning before giving our translation.

Song 1. Abụ agha: War song

These are songs sung during war time. They are songs laden with emotions and spur people to action.

The Song	Translation
A gawa la m ikwa mgbo (I am going to shoot bullets)	I am off to war
Egwu ayakata oho (dance of a hero)	Egwu ayakata oho (chorus enjoyed for its rhythm and so not translated)
A gawa la m ikwa mgbo (I am going to shoot bullets)	I am off to war
Sheri m a na-ebe (My darling is crying)	My 'chérie' is weeping
Ahapukwala m aga (Don't leave me and go)	"Do not leave me behind"
Sheri i si m gbalagha? (Darling do you want me to run away)	"Chérie", should I take off on AWOL?
Onye ga-akwa nu mgbo ma m gbalagha? (Who will shoot the gun should I run away).	Who then will fight if I take off on AWOL?

In the above song, we first gave an explanation before translating the meaning of the song. The emotion evoked in the Igbo language is not evoked in the English language. The refrain *Egwu ayakata oho* is left untranslated even though 'egwu' in the context can be translated as 'dance', *ayakata oho* has no equivalence in the English language. The chorus is enjoyed for its rhythm. Chérie was not translated because it is the pet name between the husband and his wife.

Song 2. Abụ oḷu/ oṛu: work song

The Song	Translation
Onye suwa achara nye suwa (one cuts grass one cuts)	Everyone should cut grass like (one everyone else)
Onye akpola ibe ya onye ikoni (one should not call one a jailbird)	Let none call the other a jailbird

This is a song sung by prisoners during the colonial era but has been adopted by laborers while doing their work.

Song 3. Abụ nwa: Birth song

The Song	Translation
Kpɔwara m nwa omumu m lee (call for me my children)	Please advise my children
Ka ha vunye m oche lee (let them give me seat)	To take good care of me

Omumu mere ede m agaghị ahia (children made my cocoyam not to go to market)	To train them I lived like a peasant
Ka ha vunye m oche (let them give me seat)	Let them take good care of me
Ka ukwu nde m n'ala ee (let me sit down)	So that I can relax

The song is of the Ngwa dialect and it is idiomatic. '*Kpowa m*' means 'call for me'. We have used 'advise' because that is the meaning the message conveys. '*Ka ha vunye m oche*' literally means "let them give me seat". The intended meaning portrayed is that of "taking good care of her" hence the translation: Let them take good care of me. The *lee* conveys the idea of 'please'. The cocoyam is personified as not going to the market "*ede m agaghị ahia*". The translation clarifies the issue: "lived like a peasant". In the Igbo tradition, men cultivate yams while women cultivate cocoyams. The woman in question is a widow who could not sell her cocoyams to make money like other women because she used them to feed her children.

Song 4. Abụ ọzọ: title song

Translation

Bia lee nū ndi akporo nwoko (come and see those called men)	Come and see real men
Nwoko nwoko (men, men)	Real men, real men
Ọ bughị ọha bụ nwoko n'ezie (not all are men)	In fact, there are men and there are men

In the Igbo culture, titled men are seen as important asserts of the society. They are seen as real men. The translation portrays the meaning of the song.

Song 5. Abụ ozu: funeral song (dirge)

Translation

Onwụ bụ onye ohi ooo (death is a thief)	Death is a thief ooo
O zuru Ọ gbalaga (It steals and runs away)	It steals and absconds

Death is here personified as a thief the *ooo* is just for emphatic rhythm. It is not translated but borrowed.

Song 6. Iro iro (ie ifo ifo): Tale song

It is a short narrative rendered as song. It is in verse and this differentiates it from the oral tale which is in prose.

Translation

Nne nne nne (mother, mother, mother)	Mother, mother, mother
Kwa unu mụchara m kpọ m Ọnụgu na-agba	You gave birth to me and named me

n'igwe (I think you delivered me and called me vegetable found in heaven)	<i>Onuugu na-agbanigwe</i>
Tinya ngo	<i>Tinyango</i>
Unu amuta m kpo m Onuugu na-agba n'igwe (you delivered me and called me vegetable found in heaven)	When you gave birth to me you gave me the name <i>Onuugu na-agbanigwe</i>
Tinya ngo	<i>Tinyango</i>
Ohu agbara agba kporo m Onuugu akpatara <i>nikpa</i> (a bought slave called me vegetable found in the wilderness)	A common slave called me <i>nikpa akpatara Onuugu</i>
Tinya ngo	<i>Tinyango</i>
I kpata m n'ikpa (if you plucked me from the wilderness)	If you got me from the wilderness
Tinya ngo	<i>Tinyango</i>
A la je m n'ikpa (I will go back to the wilderness)	Then back to the wilderness I go
Tinya ngo	<i>Tinyango</i>
Umụ agboghọ ibe m (girls like me) Ndi na-agba ojigbo (They are dancing <i>ojigbo</i>)	My mates are dancing <i>ojigbo</i>
Tinya ngo	<i>Tinyango</i>
A lawala m (I am going)	I am going away
Tinya ngo	<i>Tinyango</i>
Jee gbara ojigbo (to go and dance <i>ojigbo</i>)	To dance <i>ojigbo</i>
Tinya ngo	<i>Tinyango</i>

This tale song belongs to the group of tale songs that is part of folktale but has been “extracted from the parent body and sung on its own” Chukwuma (1994, p. 40). In the tale song, marvelous things happen: fishes talk, animals/plants become humans. It is really a world of fantasy as could be seen from the above where a vegetable becomes a child. The name *onuuguna-agbanigwe* is figurative. It is treated as a proper noun and is not translated. It depicts ‘precious vegetable’ as literally it means ‘vegetable from heaven’. The derogatory name used by the slave *onuugu akpatara nikpa* is equally figurative: worthless vegetable, literally meaning ‘vegetable from the wilderness’. The refrain *Tinya ngo* is not translated as it has no meaning but gives rhythm to the song.

Song 7. Abụ ụmụaka: Children's song

These include lullabies and rhymes. Our sample song is a lullaby.

Abụ ụmụaka: Children's song**Translation**

Onye na-egbu di nwa nne m nta e?
(Who is killing my little sister e?)

Who is hurting my younger sister?

Refrain: Wuu wuu wu mbele

Wuu wuu wu mbele

Nwanne m nta m tọrọ atọ
(My sister that I am older than)

My sister who is much younger than I am

Refrain: Wuu wuu wu mbele

Wuu wuu wu mbele

Ya aka m ivu ka m ọcha
(She became fatter and fairer)

She is fatter and fairer than I am

Refrain: Wuu wuu wu mbele

Wuu wuu wu mbele

Mụ-agbara ọla ka ya mma
(I put on a bangle and became more
beautiful)

But when I put on a bangle
I become more beautiful

Ehee e-e-e h

Ehee e-e-e h

The *na-egbu* in the song which literally portrays the idea of 'killing' is translated 'hurting' for that is the meaning in the song. The refrain consisting of extra linguistic sounds *Wuu wuu wu mbele* is not translated '*mbele*' meaning snail does not convey the idea of snail but is just a sound that wedges the *wuu*. The *Ehee e-e-e h* is also extra linguistic sound and has no equivalence.

Song 8. Itu-afa (Itu-aha): Praise poem

The Igbo people are fond of praise names or titles which are given to them by the community to which they belong or which they call themselves because of their achievements in the community. Mazizi Kunene as cited by Chukwuma (1994: 43) confirms this when he points out that "almost every member of the society has his 'praise-name' which is either given to him or made by himself about his deeds..." The praise name is an affirmation of social ethic. Chukwuma further recognizes three widely known praise epithets for men: *Ogbuagu*, *Ogbuefi*, *Ogbuebunu*, literally translated, these titles mean "killer of tiger, killer of cow and killer of ram respectively. However, all these titles suggest bravery or confer a warrior status on the individual. Emenanjo (1996: 34) proposes other titles from which we chose the following:

a) Gaagaa na-ogwu (someone who can easily cross thorns) meaning = a tough person

- b) Akwaa akwuru (one who cannot be pushed down) meaning = one who cannot be easily defeated
- c) Anụ kpọrọnkụ na-eju ọnụ (dry meat that fills the mouth) meaning = small but mighty
- d) Ọnwa naetiri ọha (the moon that shines for all) meaning = a philanthropist
- e) Ọku naagba ọzara (the harmattan fire that razes the forest) meaning = a smart person
- f) Agbara ahụrụ gbuo ọkụkọ (he who the deity sacrifices to) meaning = first among equals/a very important personality.

From the above we can see that some names that used to be derogatory have been acquired as titles. What we have done is to give the meaning of the titles. The titles are treated as proper nouns. They do not have equivalents in the English language. Translating these titles without the application of the interpretative theory will not evoke the feeling or emotions that they are meant to depict.

Song 9. Abụ arịrịọ: Plea song

In a typical Igbo setting and in Africa, the childlessness of a couple is attributed to the woman. Our example of a plea song is that of a barren woman pleading for the husband's patience. It is a passionate plea for patience.

Abụ arịrịọ: Plea song	Translation
Di m lee abụ m oyoyo (My husband I am alright)	My dear husband I am healthy
Ọ bughị m kere nwa (I did not create children)	I do not create children
N'ọ bụ nụ Chukwu kere nwa (It is God who creates children)	But God does
Ezigbo di m ewele iwe (My good husband do not be annoyed)	My darling husband please exercise patience
A ga m amụrụ gị nwa (I will give birth to a child for you)	I will bear you a child
Chineke kere nwa (God who creates children)	God who creates children
Bia nyere m aka (come and help me)	Please come to my rescue
Ụkọ nwa a kọla m (let me not be in want of a child)	Let me not be barren

Unu amarala ọgwụ e ji alụ di? (Do you know the spell for marriage?)	Do you know the key to a successful marriage?
Nke mbu ee (The first is) Gị mara mgbe agurū gurū ya (know when he is hungry)	Firstly, know when your husband is hungry
Nke abụọ ee (The second is) Gị mara mgbe ego kọrọ ya (know when he has no money)	Secondly, know when he is broke
Nke atọ ee (The third is) Sị gị kwusị okwukwu okwukwu (Do not talk continuously)	Thirdly, desist from nagging

The title of this song is idiomatic. *Ọgwụ* here is used in a positive sense not in a negative sense hence the translation “key to a successful marriage” the message contained in the Igbo language fits into the English culture because these are the basic things that are necessary for a successful marriage. Though there is no mention of love, it is implied. The humour that goes with the Igbo rendition was lost in the English translation.

Problems of Translating Igbo Songs

The problems of translation could be caused by factors that are geographical, socio-political, scientific and human in nature (Nida 1945). These factors could also be as a result of socio-cultural differences. Some socio-cultural activities as portrayed in the Igbo songs do not exist in the English language and so have no equivalents. In effect, the translator has to accept the lack of similar cultural convention between the source language and the language towards which he is working. He/she finds himself sandwiched between these two languages and tries as much as he/she can to be faithful in his rendition of the meaning contained in the source language and to communicate.

Cultural differences lead to untranslatability. For instance, some phonological sounds in the Igbo language cannot be expressed in the English language for the reason that no two languages can represent the same social reality. They live in two distinct worlds. In view of this reality, an attempt at making these distinct worlds the same by translating the untranslatable in them will result in a gain or loss of information.

The poetic and rhythmic nature of Igbo songs create rhetoric problems in translation. There abound also semantic and syntactic problems resulting from the differences in culture. Translation aims at providing semantic equivalence between two languages. This may seem simple but perfect equivalence is almost impossible (except for scientific terms) Crystal (1987, p. 344) is of the same opinion. He contends that:

Exact equivalence is impossible: no translator could provide a translation that was a perfect parallel to the source text; in such respects as rhythm sound, symbolism, puns, and cultural allusions... there is always some loss of information. Translators not only need to know their source language well, they must also have a thorough understanding of the field of knowledge covered by the source text and of any social, cultural, or emotional connotations that need to be specified in the target language if the intended effect is to be conveyed.

The same level of competence in the source language is equally needed in the target language. Thus, the translator takes into account taboos, local expressions, customs, etc. of both languages.

Problems Encountered and Solutions Proffered

We have stated that to us, translation is the re-expression of the message contained in a source text into a target text. We tried as much as possible to re-express the message contained in the sample songs we translated though not without difficulties. The problems were mainly on the socio-cultural aspects of the text to be translated. To solve such problems, we adapted our translations where we find non-existing situations. We were able to use equivalents in certain cases and translated the meaning in other aspects.

(a) At the phonological level

The English and Igbo languages are from two different cultural backgrounds. As a result of this disparity in culture, the rhythm, the rhymes, the tone, the poetic arrangements and the sound effect were found to be untranslatable and distorted. We were able to communicate translating meaning instead of words.

(b) Semantic and syntactic problems

Every language has a particular way of expressing concepts, ideas and their meanings hence the difficulty encountered in finding appropriate words that best express concepts from Igbo to English. Besides, the word order in Igbo differs from that of English. Here, the Interpretative theory came to our aid as we were able to express the meanings of the Igbo songs into English.

We had earlier stated that most of the difficulties encountered were as a result of cultural differences. Nida and Taber (1982, p. 161) submit to the same view when they opine that “differences between culture cause many more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure”. Realizing this fact, we were able to overcome the problem of untranslatability by retaining such untranslatable words like *eeeeeh*, *tinyango*, *wuu wuu wumbele* etc. since there is no equivalent of these words in the English language. An attempt to translate these will lead to the loss of rhythm and its semantic effect.

Conclusion

Igbo songs are channels that depict noble ideas, encouragements and discouragement from sinful acts, acknowledgement and condemnation of vices. They can praise, entertain, express opinions on important issues and express social values.

Our aim in translating Igbo songs into English is to expose the Igbo culture to the outside world and to stress the fact that translation is not a matter of words. For Instance, *Ogwu e ji alu di* (Spell for marriage) is translated to depict its meaning: Key to a successful marriage. As could be observed, each of the songs is unique. The songs themselves are holistic art forms in that they embrace music, dance, drama, clapping etc. They are didactic in nature as they teach and acquaint us with Igbo morals and virtues. These songs undergo transformations from age to age.

By doing this work, we have tried to prove that a perfect translation in culture bound texts is impossible but semantic and equivalent translations are possible. By applying the interpretative theory, we tried to adapt the cultural elements into the English language and establish a foundation for inter-relationships between two cultures: Igbo and English. We equally made use of our linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge to translate the songs. We believe that since the world has become a global village, translating from the Igbo language will go a long way to expose our culture and social values to the outside world.

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