Examining the barriers hindering the effective translation of folktales

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Abstract
The role of translation studies as a discipline in global interaction and mutual co-operation cannot be over emphasized. Translation is vital because it cuts across every facet of human lives. Translation brings home to the people, in the language they understand, the meaning or the content of another language, which is foreign to them. Folktale is rich in cultural values and tradition of a particular group of people. Because of these features of folktale, they make its translation so demanding and challenging. The thrust of this paper is therefore to look at certain factors that could contribute to the difficulties in the translation of folktales. This aim is hoped to be achieved through the translation of selected folktales from The Calabash of Wisdom and other Igbo Stories by R. Egudu and Oka Mgba by J.O. Iroaganachi.
Keywords: Translation, folktales, culture

1.0 Introduction

As the world shrinks into a global village, communication gaps are bridged. People tend to develop interest in the history and culture of others. Exchange of values, knowledge, history and cultural transmission are now at their peak. This is mostly achieved through translation. Any activity going on in any part of the world is heard all over the world. How then does this happen when there are numerous languages in the world? Translation is the vehicle through which news, literature, culture, history etc are transmitted from one socio-cultural boundary to another. Folktale translation is not left out in this regard. Folktale translation is

the fastest means through which the culture of a particular group of people is displayed. Folktales are rich in culture and the totality of the way of life of a given people is manifested in folktales. Folktale translation is as difficult as poetic translation. The difficulties in folktale translation could be traced in the ejaculatory expression, ecological factors, call and response sequence a proverbs and in idiomatic expressions, to mention but a few. The essence of looking into these factors is for adequate knowledge of them in order to expose literary translators to various ways to wangle out of the problems.

1.1 Definition of terms

Translation is more than mere transferring of message. It is an art and craft. Translation can inform or misinform. When handled well, it creates the same impact as the original text.

The purpose of translation is to pass on an understanding to people in their own language and create the same impact as the original text. Wikipedia, free Encyclopedia perceives translation as "the communication of the meaning of a source language text by means of an equivalent target language text". Ajunwa (2014:3) defines translation as 'the rendering in writing of a source language text. Into the target language, with a view to preserving, as much as possible the source language message and style'. Translation is more than just reproducing the author's text. It borders more on reproducing the author's intent, view on a particular issue, his mood, style and stylistics. This means that for one to translate an author, one must become the author as at the time of translation in order to attain fidelity in translation.

Folktale is rich in cultural values and tradition of the people. Folktales are fallacious tales or stories, used in inculcating good character, encouraging good behaviour and discouraging ill behaviors among the people. Folktale is considered to be the origin of oral literature, Nwadike (1992:22). Folktale portrays real life situations and truth, which ordinary story cannot portray. Nwadike further says that folktales are mainly used in teaching children good moral character,

learning things about the world, speaking the truth, obedience and obeying the laws of their land. Okebalama (2003:47) says that in Igbo setting, folktales are stories of the night. The origin of folktale is a mystery to mankind. They are stories transferred from one generation to another. No one could tell the originator of these stories.

Some of the characters of folktales include:

1. It is a communal activity. There is always a story teller and an audience that listens to the story.
2. Folktales normally have specific words, which acts as an introductory sequence before the story in full. Some call it 'formula'. Such words in Igbo folktales are:

Story Teller	**Audience**
Ifo chakpii	Wqq
Otii	Qyq
Nk[ta nyara akpa	Ns[agwx n'qh[a.

3. Folktales are rich in sing and response poetic sequence. This acts as a way of keeping the audience mind active and focused throughout the story.

Again, since folktales are mainly done at night, these songs devoid the participants the opportunity to doze off. Example of such songs is:

Child, stop, stop, crying	Zemililize
Stop crying, Omelukpagham's child	Zemililize

Our mother warned us not to allow smoke to escape	Zemililize
But we allowed smoke to escape	Zemililize
Our father warned us not to pound in mortar	Zemililize
But we pounded in mortar morta	Zemililize

(Extractions from The Calabash of Wisdom P. 140).

4. Figures of speech are prominent in folktales. The most prominent among all is 'personification'. In folktale, anything can happen. Any creature or item can assume the character of human being. Animals can speak, man and animals interact. For one to fully participate in folktale, there is always a suspension of disbelief.
5. Folktale has three major settings –
   a) Human Kingdom
   b) Animal Kingdom
   c) Spiritual Kingdom (Heavenly Kingdom).

Sometimes, an activity in folktale may involve more than one kingdom.
As observed earlier, folktales are stories transferred from one generation to another. Every tribe existing in the world has folktale. People exchange stories in order to know more about each other. Folktales are exchanged from one tribe to another. The vehicle that makes such exchange possible is folk translation.

2.0 What is folktale translation?

Folktale translation otherwise known as folktranslation is the translation of folktales. On a broader definition, it involves the

translation of folksongs and folklore. Folktales have traditional origin and as such poses additional problems to the translator. Apart from poetic translation, which is considered the most difficult among other literary genres, folktranslation is also difficult because of its cultural and traditional origin. As we all know, culture varies from one group of people to another. Translating folktales from one language to another between two cultural groups cannot be easily attained without barriers.

2.1 English–Igbo translation of selected folktales from *The Calabash of Wisdom*

Origin of Death	***Mmalite Ọnwx***
English	**Igbo**
One day God threatened to destroy the world. All mankind was afraid and assembled to decide how to prevent this disaster. During the meeting there arose two opposing groups. One group said that men should not die at all. The other group said that Death was necessary as long as people died one after another. After endless arguments on both sides, God rose in anger and said that he would destroy everybody at once unless mankind reached an agreement within the next two days. It was clear to mankind	Otu xbqch[, Chineke kpebiri imebi xwa. Egwu jidere mmadx dum nke mere na ha zukqtara ikpebi ihe ha ga-eme iji gbanahx ya bx qdach[. Na nzukq ahx, e nwere otu ndqrqndqrq abxq. Otu òtù kwuru na mmadx agagh[na-anwx ma ncha. Otu nke qzq kwuru na q bxrx na a ga na-anwx n'otu n'otu na qnwx bx ihe kwes[r[ekwes[. Nke a butere oke ndqrqndqrq nke enwegh[mkpebi. Niihi nke a, Chineke

that they could not agree. Each group decided it would present its case directly to God. The group that did not want Death at all decided to send their memorandum through the Dog. The opposing group chose the Tortoise as their agent. It would be a long journey for the Dog and the Tortoise. To reach God's kingdom they had to travel across seven seas and seven deserts. Those who did not want Death were confident that the Dog would be the first to reach God since he was faster than the Tortoise. As soon as the signal was given, the Dog dashed off amidst the cheers of those who did not want Death. At midday he entered the bush where he sought animal dung for his belly. The Tortoise went on slowly but steadily. Not once did he stop to eat or drink. The Tortoise reached God's kingdom before the Dog. He tapped at God's door and as soon as he was greeted delivered his message. God accepted it and agreed that Death should take people one	were oke iwe wee kwuo na q ga-ememina nd[mmadx ma q bxrx na ha enwegh[otu nkwekqr[ta tupu abali abxq agas[a. ka nd[mmadx enwegh[ike inwe otu nkwekqr[ta gbasara qnqdx a, otu qbxla kpebiri ibugara Chineke mkpebi ha. otu nd[achqgh[qnwx ma ncha zigara nkwekqr[ta ha site n'aka nkita. Nd[otu nke qzq zigara nkwekqr[ta ha site n'aka mbe. Ya bx njem [ga na be Chukwu ga-abx nke tere nnukwu aka. Ha ga-agafe [kpa naasaa na mmiri naasaa wee rute na be Chukwu. Nd[otu achqgh[qnwx nwere nnukwu afq ojuju niihina ha kwenyere na nk[ta ga-eburiri xzq ruo na be Chukwu makana q na-agbakar[mbe n'qsq. Ngwa ngwa. Ozugbo a gwara ha malite njem, nk[ta nupu qsq d[ka xzx nd[otu ya na-ajali ya ike. N'ete

after another. Meanwhile the Dog, who had fallen asleep after a heavy lunch, had stirred and was hurrying to God's kingdom. But he arrived after God had decided that Death should take men. No matter how he begged God would not accept his message. Since that day Death has been taking men one after another.	ehihie, nk[ta banyere n'qh[a iri ns[. Ma mbe jiri nwayqq aga ije ya. Q kwxs[gh[ma ncha n'xzq iri nri maqbx [nx mmiri. Mbe bx nk[ta xzq ruo alaeze Chineke. Q kxrx aka n'qnxxzq Chukwu. Ozigbo a nabatara ya, o ziri ya ozi o ji b[a. Chineke nabatara ya bx ozi ma kpebie na mmadx ga na-anwx n'otu n'otu. Nk[ta bx onye xra buuru d[ka o ris[r[ns[tetara wee were qsq d[egwu gbagaba na be Chukwu. Mana q b[arutere mgbe Chukwu kpebierela na qnwx ga na-egbu nd[mmadx. N'agbanyegh[etu o si r[q Chukwu, q jxrx [nabata ozi ya. Bido n'xbqch[ahx, qnwx na-egbu nd[mmadx n'otu n'otu.

2.2 English–Igbo translation of selected folktales from *Oka mgba*

The Tortoise and Lion **Mbe na Agx**

English	Igbo
One day, the lion was very hungry. He had no food to eat.	Otu xbqch[agxx gxrx Agx nke ukwuu. Q

He therefore concluded that he will kill many animals, eat some and keep some for another day. He highlighted his wife about his plan. He said I am going inside to hide, afterwards, start crying. If any animal comes to know why you are crying, tell that animal to come inside. The wife started crying. The animals started going to the wife to inquire why she cries. Each time any animal ask her why she is crying, she answers: Come here and ask me that *Nda hii I, ee nda.* Come here and ask me *Nda hii I, ee nda.* My wicked husband is not at home *Ee nda* My heartless husband is not at home *Ee nda.* Once the animal step inside to console her, the lion will rush out besiege the animal and kill it. That was how so many animals were killed until the tortoise came. When he asked the lion's wife why she is crying, the wife answered:	d[gh[nri oo nwere q ga-eri. Ya ekpebie n'onwe ya na ya ga-egbu qtxtx xmxanxmanx, rie xfqdx, dotekwa xfqdx. Q gwara nwunye ya ihe q gaje ime. Ya as[nwunye ya, "M na-aga [r[n'ime xlq. Mgbe m mere nke a, malite bewe akwa. Anx qbxla b[ara [jx g[ihe na-egbu g[akwa, s[ya bata n'xlq". Nwunye ya ekwe. Agx abaa n'ime xlq ya ga r[a. nwunye ya akpqp[a n'akwa. Xmxanxmanx agbara gaa ile ihe mere o ji ebe akwa. Mgbe qbxla anx qbxla b[ara jxq ya ihe na-egbu ya, ya as[ya: B[a nga a jxq m ya, *Nda hii I, ee nda.* B[a nga a jxq m ya, *Nda hii I, ee nda.* Onye arxrx ala d[m anqgh[n'xlq *Ee nda* Imerekime d[m anqgh[n'xlq

Come here and ask me that "Nda hii I, ee nda". Come here and ask me Nda hii I, ee nda. My wicked husband is not at home Ee nda My heartless husband is not at home Ee nda. When tortoise noticed the manner with which the lion's wife sang the music, he knew that the lion is at home and that he has killed many animals. He stood his ground outside and refused to enter inside. He rather sang his own music: I am here asking you, Nda hii I, ee nda I am here asking you. Nda hii I, ee nda Your wicked husband is at home. Ee nda Your heartless husband is at home Ee nda. When the lion heard this, he came out from his house	*Ee nda* Ma anx ahx batala [hx ya akwa, Agx agbapxta jide ya gbuo. Q bx otu a ka q siri gbuo qtxtx n'ime xmxanxmanx tutuu Mbe agbara b[a. mgbe q jxrx nwunye Agx ihe kpataara ya akwa, nwunye Agx as[ya: B[a nga a jxq m ya, *Nda hii I, ee nda.* B[a nga a jxq m ya, *Nda hii I, ee nda.* Onye arxrx ala d[m anqgh[n'xlq *Ee nda* Imerekime d[m anqgh[n'xlq *Ee nda* Mgbe Mbe hxrx out nwunye Agx siri gxq nkwa a, ya amata na Agx nq n'xlq, matakwa na o gbuole qtxtx xmxanxmanx. Ya eguzoro n'ezi, jx [ba n'ime xlq Agx. Ya

begging tortoise to come inside. The tortoise refused. He pleaded in all forms for tortoise to come inside but he refused. He then gave tortoise a chase and tortoise ran home. And the lion didn't kill tortoise as he did to other animals.	agxqrq nwunye Agx nkwa nke ya, s[: Anq m nga a ajx g[ya, *Nda hii i, ee nda.* Anq m nga a ajx g[ya, *Nda hii i, ee nda.* Onye arxrx ala d[g[nq n'xlq *Ee nda* Imerekime d[g[nq n'xlq *Ee nda* Mgbe Agx nxrx nke a, ya esi n'xlq ya pxta. Ya ar[q Mbe ka q bata. Mbe ajx [ba. Agx ekpee aka, kpee ihe ka q bata. Mbe ajx [ga. Agx achxwa ya qsq. Ya agbalaa. Agx egbugh[kwa ya.

3.0 Barriers hindering the effective translation of folktales

Folktale translator must be competent in two languages i.e. the source language and the target language. He will go as far as knowing the traditions, norms and being equipped in the history and cultural values of the people of the two languages. This is to enable him arrive at

a good translation. As observed earlier, folktales have traditional origin and as such poses number of problems to the translator. Below are the barriers that may hinder the translation of folktales.

3.1 Ecological factors:

Ecological factors pose a lot of problem to the translator. Ecological factors include; Geographical setting, food, weather, animals etc. They vary from one cultural group to another e.g. Native food in the source language folktale may not be found in the target language, same with weather, animal etc. This poses a great problem to the translator as he tries to find the equivalence in the target language.

3.2 Ejaculatory expression:

Okebalama referred to this as "formula". Some folktales have certain ejaculatory expression used as induction. These expressions are often used to introduce folktales. It raises the consciousness of the audience in order to be attentive to the folk tale being introduced. These ejaculatory expressions are usually in call and response sequence.
Example 1: Igbo

Narrator	Audience
O tii!	Q yqqq!
Nk[ta nyara akpa	Ns[agwx n'qh[a
O nwere akxkq m ga- akqrq xnx	Kqqrq any[ka obi d[any[mma

Example 2: Yoruba

Narrator	Audience
Hee- Haa- Hee	Antre! Tititata!

While some authors suggest that these expressions are better left untranslated, but italicized in the target language, and explanatory notes given; Others argue that the meaningful expression that are mostly proverbs should be translated while ignoring the meaningless ones. This as such becomes a problem to translators.

3.3 Characters with connotative meanings:

The connotative meaning is usually the meaning, which derives from the semantic extension or change in the original meaning of some words. Connotative meanings are usually figurative in intent. In Igbo folktales, there are characters that when their names are mentioned, certain meaning appears in the mind of the audience. E.g. the connotative meaning of tortoise is craftiness, wittiness and cunning; pig is dirtiness, dog – fastness, he-goat – sexiness etc.

It is worthy to note that these connotative meanings associated with the characters above vary from one culture to another. In English folktales, the animal associated with the characters of tortoise in Igbo, is the 'grass cutter'. In Yoruba, it is called 'Anini'. Other cultures also have various names. While some suggest that the equivalence of these characters be used while translating, others argue that if the equivalence is used, problems are still bound to be since these animals though with similar characterization, they have different nature and appearances, which may pose serious problem in the meaning of the translated passage. For example, if the English equivalence of tortoise i.e. 'grass cutter' is to be used in such folktale like 'Oku Chukwu Kpqrq Xmxanxmanx n'eluigwe', what happens to the part of the story which

says that the tortoise fell down and its shell broke into pieces? Grass cutter, though has the same connotative meaning in English as tortoise, it has no shell.

3.4 Translation of expression

Not until now most of the folktales are written down, folktales have one of its characteristics as being an oral genre of literature. Up till today, even though written down, folktales are still oral stories with the audience present at the time of the story.

The presence of the audience influences the story teller. He performs certain expressions during the story telling. Such expressions like clapping of hands, humming a passage, dancing, chanting etc., which are aimed at maintaining the consciousness of the audience throughout the story, may be impossible to translate.

3.5 Poetic sequence/ call and response sequence:

Similar to ejaculatory expression is poetic sequence normally found in the middle of the folktales. They are usually statements from one of the characters in the folktales, which are put in songs with their responses. Folktales 1 and 2 have some poetic sequence. Some of these words can be translated while some cannot be translated.

3.6 Proverbs and figures of speech:

Though there are laid down rules in tackling proverb translation, some proverbs and other figures of speech seems to be difficult to translate. Finding their equivalence poses a problem to the translator, especially, those that are attached to a particular tradition or cultural phenomenon.

4.0 Summary and conclusion

Folktranslation is a term, which describes the translation of folktales. Folktales have traditional origin. As a result of this, its translation usually poses additional problems to the translator. An attempt was made in this work to examine these problems or barriers, which may hinder the effective translation of folktales. The barriers include: ecological factors, ejaculatory expressions, call and response sequence, proverbs and figures of speech. Adequate knowledge of these barriers will expose literary translators to better ways to follow in order to attain fidelity, and arrive at a good translation.

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