

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Challenges of Translated Kiswahili Texts

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Abstract:

Translation is a complex exercise that involves not only transfer of meaning of linguistic aspects of translated texts but more importantly their literary aspects. This means that as Omboga 2006:50 observes a translator must of primary importance understand the historical social and geographical contexts of the target audience so as to come up with the translated text that meets their knowledge, expectations and values. This paper examined the plays written by Kithaka wa Mberia in Kiswahili and translated in English with a view of identifying some of the challenges facing translation of texts from Kiswahili Language to English language. We have assessed the themes presented, linguistic and stylistic devices employed and the characters presented to see whether the knowledge, expectations and values of the target audience are met. Given that these texts are originally written in Kiswahili, it was important to see how the translator conveys the message to the wider audience targeted by the choice of use of English language. In our analysis employed the Skopos theory of translation which focuses on translation as a purposive activity intended for a particular audience. The conclusion is that the translated texts have not to a great extent conveyed the intended message to the audience targeted as the translators focused mainly on the linguistic equivalents and to a large extent failed to meet the knowledge, expectations and values of the wider audience targeted and thus translating Kiswahili texts to English remains a monumental task.

Keywords: challenges, translation, play, themes, Kiswahili, texts

1. Introduction

Kiswahili literature boasts a wealth of translated texts from many languages and cultures following its long contacts and interactions with equally many literacy and cultural traditions. Since the advent of written literature in Kiswahili, which may be put anywhere between 1500-1662 AD (Wamitila 2001: 24), the translation of literary texts into Kiswahili has played an important role in the development of Kiswahili literature. Consequently, over the years, literary translation has become an academic and scholarly pursuit that arouses a lot of interest as well as controversy among scholars and critics of Kiswahili literature.

Many studies have focused on the strengths and weaknesses of translated texts as well as methodological and linguistic flaws exhibited by texts. However, most of what has been written on literary translation in Kiswahili is characterized by preoccupation with the texts written in other languages then translated in Kiswahili with a view of checking the linguistic equivalents with the source text. The texts written originally in Kiswahili then translated into other languages has not been given a lot of emphasis which this paper attempts to do.

The first known translations were poems located in Arabic literary, cultural and historical contexts such as Alfu Lela Ulela, Hamziya and utendi wa Tambuka just to mention a few. (Omboga 2006:25-26) Kiswahili literature has also received translated texts from Greek such as Mfalme Edipode, Russia-Mkaguzi Mkuu wa Serikali, Finish-utenzi wa Kalevala, Portuguese-Chagua Maisha, English-Mabepari wa Venisi among many others. It also hosts translations from African authors like Kitereza A. Bwana Myombekere na Bibi Bugonoko, wimbo wa Lawino Okot Bitek, Shetani Msalabani by Ngugi wa Thiongo.

The translation of literary texts from various historical and cultural backgrounds is evidence of an intense literary and cultural interaction between Kiswahili and other languages and cultures. This has expanded and enriched Kiswahili literature to the extent that today many Kiswahili texts are being translated in other languages which has continued to expand and enrich Kiswahili literature and make it reach a wider audience. It is with this in mind that this paper examines selected Kiswahili texts written by Kithaka wa Mberia and translated in English language by other writers. We will examine whether the translated texts have the same themes as original texts, how the Characters have been portrayed and how the literary devices have been employed to convey the message in the original texts to the target audience in specific circumstances thus helping us to identify the challenges facing translations from Kiswahili to English.

This study will be guided by Skopos theory which focuses on translation as an activity with a purpose that is intended to an audience. To translate means to produce a target text in target audience in target circumstances. It then follows that the function of translation depends on the knowledge, expectations, values and norms of target readers who

are influenced by the state they are in and by culture. Thus, the translated text must be internally coherent, it must also be coherent with source text and the translated text is determined by its skopos.

1.1. *Flowers In The Morning Sun (Kasu & Marani 2011) Translation Of Maua Kwenye Jua La Asubuhi (Mberia 2004)*

Flowers in the morning sun is a play which talks about the two ethnic communities Ndikus and Tanges who are fighting each other as result of incitement by their leaders so as to achieve political goals. The Ndikus led by Chebwe and Toiche keep on attacking the Tanges led by Kabitho and Tungai who are ready to defend themselves using any possible means. Kabitho is advancing his theory that should they be attacked they should not only attack the attackers who armed but also kill innocent women and children. Tungai who is a retired military officer is opposed to that and even he opposes the use of children in the war against their enemy. Waito and Nali who are young and belong to different ethnic communities manage to convince the two communities to keep peace and avoid a bloody conflict stage managed by the leaders Chebwe and Kabitho for their own selfish ends. Thus, they are flowers in the morning sun because as different flowers grow in the same garden each beautiful in its own day then there is a possibility different ethnic community can live together harmoniously.

The themes of conventions of war, ethnic animosity, bad governance, family relationships, class interrelationships and abuse of office are well presented to a large extent as it is in the original Kiswahili text. This comes out well when Kabitho and Tungai are talking about involvement of children in the war and Tungai who is a retired soldier says: No Kabitho! It's not right to destroy the lives of children. Once children get involved in ravages of war, once they get introduced to drugs, they no longer have hope in life.....pg. 50.

There is talk of Richard Taylor and Richard Taylor Sankoh who both used the children in the war, The National Army of Sudan who were at war with the southern inhabitants but amidst all this Tungai maintains that International Humanitarian Law must be followed as stipulated in the Geneva convention. Bad governance comes out well when Chebwe instigates tribal conflicts so as to win the forthcoming elections and also retain large tracts of land after evicting the Tanges. In all this the citizens continue suffering as they are killed, maimed and displaced in their own country. The hope lies with a few people like Waito, Nali and Neche who are ready to stop these activities and live harmoniously with their neighbours.

A translated text must produce a target text in target addresses in target circumstances for its message to be well understood. It must keep in mind the historical and geographical context of the target audience for it to communicate effectively. The original text in this case is set in an African setting as the issue of ethnic conflict is more pronounced in African countries. There is mention of war in Liberia and Sudan which are African countries. It is our view that for the translated text which is aimed at a wider audience of the whole world as the translator says that the translation was commissioned and funded by International Committee of Red cross to disseminate the tenets of the international Humanitarian Law, the translator should have included aspects of real war than just the ethnic clashes between two communities. The translated text should have been expanded in scope to include wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, North Korea and other European countries to underscore the fact that the tenets International Humanitarian Law are meant for the whole world and not African countries only. This means that the translated text focused on linguistic equivalents rather than the message as intended in the original text.

On the same vein, the translated text should have included aspects of International Criminal Court for it to be widely appreciated. This is because the function of translation depends on the knowledge, expectations, values and norms of the target readers who are influenced by the situation they are in and by culture. (Malangwa 2014:107). Thus while it's true that the themes are to a certain extent well presented as in the original text, the translated text fails to capture to a large extent the knowledge, expectations and values of the target audience by limiting the main plot to two ethnic communities and mentioning only some African countries who have been at war and excluding the aspects of International Criminal justice system and as Omboga (2006) asserts translation is a creative act in which the translated text participates in the creation of knowledge and by extension power....it participates in its own creation. (pg. 91). The process of translation is a process of gathering new and creating new information to make it well understood and appreciated by the target audience in their specific context and time. This is not done in this translated text which could be attributed to the translators focusing too much on linguistic equivalents rather than the message to the targeted audience.

The translated text must use language that communicates the equivalence of the original text. One of the major problems of translation is the disparity among languages. The bigger the gap between the source language and translated language the more difficult the transfer of the message will be. Momanyi asserts that literary texts are very challenging to translate because the texts are creative works and are written in artistic language. Thus, the translator must understand the linguistic differences, ideologies, history and the context. (Momanyi 2012:29)

The language used in the *Flowers in the Morning Sun* to a large extent does not communicate the message to the target audience. The title *Maua Kwenye Jua La Asubuhi* is translated as *Flowers in the Morning Sun* is misleading as it is translated word for word. There are also many phrases and proverbs that are not well translated and thus the main message is lost to a very large extent. Some of these include; *silaha za kienyenji* -crude weapons pg1, *hakuna marefu yasiyo na mwisho*-nothing lasts forever pg1, *baridi inayochoma kama moto*-biting cold that stings one's lungs pg3, *lughu nyororo*-polite language pg 3, *tuhurumie ewe mola* -take pity on us, Good Lord pg5, *baadhi ya magazeti*-sections of the local media pg 6, *damu ya kabila letu*-our people pg 9, *kuanza mapema*-early bird catches the worm pg 11 and many others throughout the text. These examples show that to a large extent the translated text has got many phrases and other linguistic and stylistic devices that don't capture the real intent and touch of the original text. The ethnic rivalry brought out by the use of Kiswahili original phrases like *yalimwaga maiti mfano wa mti umwagavyo majani makavu chini wakati wa upepo mkali*

pg 52 bado tunapambana na mlima pg 53, sura zao zinaudhi kama tamaa yao ya mali pg 54 is lacking. Also, the language used in the translated text does not meet the expectations of the target audience to a large extent because if the target audience is international readers, they would expect equivalent linguistic and stylistic devices which is not the case. Most of these are just translated word for word either distorting the meanings or losing it all together. Generally, the message is not well conveyed to the target audience of the wider world. It appears as if the text is translated for only Africans in general and Kiswahili speakers in particular, rather than the international community which is the target audience.

The characters in the translated text are presented as they are in the original text. Their names are like Kabitho, Toiche, Chebwe, Tungai just to name a few. This makes the text appear as though the target audience is people of African communities. Furthermore, their social settings seem to be in Africa where Chebwe is lying to the wife he had travelled to Tanzania yet he was busy inciting his tribesmen, Kabitho is buying arrows and Matchettes for war, warriors are being trained in the forest, Tungai is a retired soldier who even didn't return all military uniforms as required and many others. This makes the characters historical and social context not resonate well with the target audience since even the champions of peace Waito and Naila are not ideologically shown to have the knowledge and capacity to champion international peace. All characters are placed in the African setting and so to a very large extent the original text is preserved and not recreated as should happen in translation.

In general, the translated text flowers in the morning sun largely is not consistent and coherent with the original text in content, themes, linguistic devices and characterization. Thus, it faces the challenges of failing to consider the linguistic, cultural, historical and geographical contexts of the target audience thus the translated text fails to convey the message and themes of tenets and conventions of war well to the target audience which is the international community.

1.2. Death at the Well (Kasu & Marami 2011) Translation of Kifo Kisimani (Mberia 2001)

Death at the well is a play set in an imaginary African society named Butangi. The society is led by Bokono who exhibits dictatorial tendencies, corruption, political patronage, violation of human rights among other aspects of bad governance. Mwelusi a young man of 24 years foments a rebellion but is killed by his brother Gege. His death leads to a major rebellion where Bokono's government is brought down by use of force.

The themes that are shown in the play include bad governance, looting of public resources, patriotism, human freedoms, betrayal, family relationships, class interrelationships and abuse of office are not well presented to a large extent as it is in the original Kiswahili text. This comes out well when Bokono and Nyalwe are talking and Nyalwe says:

Bad governance! Its time you stopped engaging in acts that distress the people pg17. The context here is that Bokono was really disturbed after a meeting he had called failed to materialise. There is talk between Mwelusi and Gege later which shows Mwelusi is very much aware of the bad governance and its effects pg 50-51. Bad governance also comes out well when Batu and other Bokono instigates tribal conflicts so as to instill fear among the citizen like Azena. In all this the citizens continue suffering as they are killed, maimed and tortured in their own country. The hope lies with a few people like Mwelusi and Atega who are well informed, ideologically firm, who are ready to stop these activities as they lead a strong rebellion against an oppressive regime which is set to cling to power using all means possible including death the way Mwelusi is killed. The warning to these dictators like Bokono is that killing leaders only serves to strengthen dissent and rebellion thus finally Bokono's Government is brought down by the use of force.

As mentioned earlier a translated text must produce a target text in target addresses in target circumstances for its message to be well understood. It must keep in mind the historical and geographical context of the target audience for it to communicate effectively. The original text in this case is set in an African setting as the issue of bad governance characterized by dictatorship and sycophancy is more pronounced in African countries. We submit that for the translated text which is aimed at a wider audience of the whole world, the translator should have included aspects of bad governance to reflect the dictators of the world like Saddam Hussein of Iraq and Adolf Hitler of Germany among others. The translated text should have been expanded in scope to underscore the fact that the tenets of bad governance are not only confined in Africa but are exemplified all over the world because the target audience of the English translation is much wider it is meant for the whole world and not African countries only.

On the same vein, the translated text should have included aspects of a proper and well-organized government led by Bokono that can be widely appreciated by the wider audience which the target translation is targeting. This is because the function of translation depends on the knowledge, expectations, values and norms of the target readers who are influenced by the situation they are in and by culture (Malangwa 2014:107). Thus, for example, it is difficult for a wider audience to conceive government led by a chief like Chief Bokono and a few elders like Batu. While it's true that the themes are to a certain extent well presented as in the original text, the translated text fails to capture to a large extent the knowledge, expectations and values of the target audience by limiting the main plot to an imaginative village in Africa which is led by a Chief and a few elders and advisors and a prison guarded by spears and arrows which are not even ready in spite of the looming rebellion and insurgency led by Mwelusi.

Omboga asserts that translation is a creative act in which the translated text participates in the creation of knowledge and by extension power....it participates in its own creation. (Omboga 2006:9)¹. The process of translation is a process of gathering new and creating new information to make it well understood and appreciated by the target audience in their specific context and time. Thus, it's our view that the translated text should have been recreated so as to convey the message to a wider world audience for the themes to be well understood like for example instead of Chief Bokono they should have used King or President Bokono in the translated text. The elders like Batu should have been given appropriate titles like Chief minister, Prime minister etc.

Momanyi asserts that literary texts are very challenging to translate because the texts are creative works and are written in artistic language. Thus, the translator must understand the linguistic differences, ideologies, history and the context. (Momanyi 2012:15) The language used in the *Death at The Well* to a large extent does not communicate the message to the target audience. The imagery used in the title *Kifo Kisimani* translated as *Death at the Well* is misleading as it is translated word for word. There are also many phrases and proverbs that are not well translated and thus the main message is lost. Some of these include; *nimeamka vizuri nashukuru* –it's well with me, I thank the Good Lord pg1, *hivi ni viti vizuri*-these are beautiful chairs, pg2, *shikamooni* -Good morning ladies, *Ni wazalendo thabiti kama majabali*-their loyalty is beyond reproach, *sikio la kufa halisikii dawa*-those that are hellbent on dying never respond to medication, *mkate wa wishwa*-bran cake pg 63 among others. These examples show that to a large extent the translated text has got many phrases and other linguistic and stylistic devices that don't capture the real intent and touch of the original text. Also, the language used in the translated text does not meet the expectations of the target audience because if the target audience is international the readers, they would expect equivalent linguistic and stylistic devices like King Bokono or President Bokono rather than Chief Bokono. Most of these are just translated word for word either distorting the meanings or losing it all together. Generally, the message is not well conveyed to the target audience of the wider world. It appears as if the text is translated for only African audience in general and Kiswahili speakers in particular rather than the international community which is the target audience.

The characters in the translated text are presented as they are in the original text. Their names are like Bokono, Nyalwe, Mwelusi, Tanya, Gege just to name a few. This makes the text appear as though the target audience is African audience. Furthermore, their social and geographical settings seem to be in Africa where Mwelusi and Gege meet at the well of Mkomani and Mwelusi is convinced to go into privacy with him to hear a message from the mother. Gege kills him by stabbing him in the stomach fomenting a rebellion leading an overthrow Bokono's government. The use of knives and axes makes the whole translation look more targeted to African countries rather than the whole world audience. This makes the characters historical and social context not resonate well with the target audience. The champions of liberation like Mwelusi and Atega are ideologically not shown to have the knowledge and capacity to champion a rebellion and their ability to lead using a specific ideology is not well shown including their education and wide grasp of social and economic issues bedeviling the world leaders. However, the characters are not well placed in the international setting and so to a large extent the fidelity to the original text is largely lost.

In general, the translated text *Death at The Well* is largely not consistent and coherent with the original text in content, themes, linguistic devices and characterization. In addition, the translated text fails to consider the linguistic, cultural, historical and geographical contexts of the target audience and thus the translated text fails to convey the message liberation struggles and good governance as exemplified by the world as a whole.

1.3. *Natala* (Kasu & Marami 2011) Translation of *Natala* (Mberia 2011)

Natala is a play set in African society which follows traditional and cultural practices that threaten the dignity of a woman. *Natala* is a window who has to contend with greedy relatives like *Wakene* who are out to disinherit her by getting her matrimonial property by conspiracy and force. The society exhibits ignorance, high levels of male chauvinistic tendencies, corruption, bad governance and violation of human rights among others. *Natala* young window has to fight tooth and nail to protect her property as well as her dignity as human being as well as a woman.

The themes that come out in the play include, women rights, bad governance, human dignity, cultural traditions, human freedoms, betrayal, family relationships among others. In general, they are well presented to a large extent as it is in the original Kiswahili text. This comes out well when *Natala* asks *Bala* whether he thinks she is a public building doorway through which people randomly stream in and out pg24. This was after the Mortuary attendant insisted on sexual favors from *Natala* so that he can release the body of her husband for burial. Infact, the mortuary attendant attempts to rape *Natala* in his office but *Natala* kicks him down which shows that *Natala* is ready to fight for her dignity and that of women using any means available.

There is talk between *Natala* and *Wakene* that shows that *Natala* is very much aware of bad customs and traditions like women inheritance and their effects on degrading human dignity especially the dignity of women pg 60-61. Bad governance also comes out well when the chief and the police solicit for bribes and sexual favors as they issue threats to her. It is evident that the chief is actually conspiring with *Wakene* so as *Wakene* gets the land from *Natala* the chief will buy it at a throw away price as they will use government officers to change the title deed. All this shows the citizens mostly windows continue suffering as they are disinherited, dispossessed of their property and stripped of their dignity in the name of tradition and cultural practices which are outdated. The hope lies with a few people like *Natala* who are well informed, ideologically firm, who are ready to fight and resist all retrogressive traditions and cultural practices. The warning to these male chauvinists like *Wakene* and the chief is that women are ready to protect their human dignity using any means possible. Those still practicing these practices that demean women must change and accord them their full human rights and respect their human dignity.

As mentioned earlier a translated text must produce a target text in target addresses in target circumstances for its message to be well understood. It must keep in mind the historical and geographical context of the target audience for it to communicate effectively. The original text in this case is set in an African setting as the issue of outdated traditional and cultural practices which strips women of their dignity is more pronounced in African societies. Our opinion is that for the translated text which is aimed at a wider audience of the whole world, the translator should have included other aspects of women mistreatment rather than traditions alone. The translated text should have been expanded in scope to underscore the fact that the tenets of human dignity violations are not only confined in Africa because of traditional practices but are

exemplified all over the world through religions like Christianity and Islam which place a woman second to man, constitution and bad laws that propagate male chauvinism among others. This is because the target audience of the English translation is much wider it is meant for the whole world and not African countries only.

On the same vein, the translated text should have included aspects of a proper and well-organized government and institutionalized efforts and policies to end women oppression and practice of outdated practices rather than using Natala alone. This could have been widely appreciated by the wider audience which the target translation is targeting. This is because the function of translation depends on the knowledge, expectations, values and norms of the target readers who are influenced by the situation they are in and by culture. Thus, for example it is difficult for a wider audience to conceive a fight led by a lonely woman like Natala can bring real transformation to old age practices and traditions by the community. While it's true that the themes are to a certain extent well presented as in the original text, the translated text fails to capture to a large extent the knowledge, expectations and values of the target audience by limiting the main plot to some African communities and only one-woman Natala is showing resistance in fact others like Tila, Mama Lime among others are for the traditions.

It's not in contention that translation is a creative act in which the translated text participates in the creation of knowledge and by extension power....it participates in its own creation. (Omboga2006:91). The process of translation is a process of gathering new and creating new information to make it well understood and appreciated by the target audience in their specific context and time. Thus, it's our view that the translated text should have been recreated so as to convey the message to a wider world audience for the themes to be well understood by the wider audience targeted by the translated text.

Momanyi asserts that literary texts are very challenging to translate because the texts are creative works and are written in artistic language. Thus, the translator must understand the linguistic differences, ideologies, history and the context. (Momanyi 2012:15). The language used in Natala to a large extent communicates the message to the target audience. Reading through the text the message flows well and the play is easily understood. However, there are phrases and proverbs that are not well translated and thus the main message is lost. Some of these include; mnaopiga nguo pasi tuingie-Hello there! May I come in? pg1, palipo na moshi hapakosi moto-where there is smoke....pg3, uchoyo wako utakuu-this meanness of yours will bring you to a tragic end pg 5 chui halisi hawatangazi kucha zao-genuine leopards don't advertise their claws pg 7,wakati wa kampeini nitakuwa na mabunda ya shilingi ishirini ishirini-during the campaign I will be carrying bundles of one hundred notes pg77, ujane si tafrija-window hood is a traumatic experience (p g 77)among others. These examples show that to a large extent the translated text has got many phrases and other linguistic and stylistic devices that don't capture the real intent and touch of the original text. Also, the language used in the translated text does not meet the expectations of the target audience because if the target audience as international the reader would expect equivalent linguistic and stylistic devices. Most of these are just translated word for word either distorting the meanings or losing it all together. Generally, the message is not well conveyed to the target audience of the wider world. It appears as if the text if translated for only African audience in general and Kiswahili speakers in particular rather than the international community which is the target audience.

The characters in the translated text are presented as they are in the original text. Their names are like Natala, Wakene, Mama Lime, Tila, Mzee Palipali, Wakene, just to name a few. This makes the text appear as though the target audience is Africans. Furthermore, their social settings seem to be in Africa where elderly men are referred as Mama Lime, Mzee Palipali, Mzee Balu among others. The use of physical fights by Natala to fight the mortuary attendant and Wakene makes the whole translated text look like the target audience is African communities which are not enlightened rather than the whole world audience. This makes the characters historical and social context not resonate well with the target audience. However, the champions of women liberation like Natala are ideologically shown to have the knowledge and capacity to champion a liberation although their ability to lead and change the society using a specific ideology is not well shown including their education and wide grasp of social and economic issues bedeviling the female gender. However, the characters are well placed in the African setting and so to a large extent the fidelity to the original text is largely preserved. In general, the translated text Natala is largely consistent and coherent with the original text in content, themes, linguistic devices and characterization. However, by failing to consider the linguistic, cultural, historical and geographical contexts of the target audience the translated text fails to convey the message women liberation struggles and good cultural and customary practices well enshrined in constitution and other governance structures as a reflection of the wider audience of the whole world which the translated text seeks to reach.

2. Conclusion

In this paper we intended to show the challenges faced when translating texts from Kiswahili language to English language. We have discussed three plays written by Kithaka wa Mberia into at different times in Kiswahili language which were translated into English language in 2011 by Kasu and Marami with an aim of reaching a wider world audience. We have shown t translated works did not target the intended audience as it did not consider the historical, geographical and social context of the target audience since translation of creative work is creativity in itself. By using three plays we have looked at the themes presented in the translated texts, the language and stylistic devices used and how the characters are presented in relation to the source texts.

It is evident that the translators in all the three plays presented the themes as exactly as presented in the source texts. It is observed that since the target audience of the original text is actually different from the target audience of the translated texts which target audience is the whole world, the themes as presented cannot be well understood and

appreciated due to different historical and social contexts. There is need for the translators to widen the scope and recreate the texts to make the themes more acceptable and well understood by their target audience.

On the use of language and stylistic devices there is wide use of direct translation and lack of use of equivalent stylistic devices making the texts lose the touch with the original texts. The plain meaning of the texts does not come out well and the artistic aspect is largely lost. Characters are also not well placed in the social, historical geographical contexts of the target audience as should be in the translated texts as the translators sought be loyal to the original texts thus making it harder for target audience of the world to understand. However, readers who have African roots will find it not difficult to understand the texts. It's however observed that had the translators focused on the target audience, historical and social settings they would have come out with more widely accepted and understood texts by the target audience since translation of literary works in itself is creative work not merely transfer of linguistic equivalence but also literary equivalence.

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