

The Dynamics Of Language In The Sociology Of African Drama Texts Translation: Towards An Integrated Cultural Exchange

Tangyie Evani

Department of General Studies,
IUT/FV - The University of Dschang,
Republic of Cameroon
Email: tansevani@gmail.com

Abstract—The issue of whether or not signified are purely arbitrary or partly grounded upon phenomena is an aspect of great consequence in cultural translation in general, and African drama texts translation in particular.

Translation as text replacement in the domain of drama texts is subject to the characteristic of the play: - its staging, its conception in the body and voice of the actor, and the decoration. The duty of the translator is to translate these unifying aspects in a way to maintain exactness and fidelity, whereas, these unifying aspects are wrapped up in the sociology of the cultural setting. This study sets out to examine the challenges inherent to the use of language in African drama text translation and proposes an approach that provides a greater bearing to facilitate an effective integrated communicative exchange.

The study further examines the language mechanism that can enable the drama-text translator have a greater insight of theatre language as a manifestation of arts, and demonstrates how an integrated cultural approach can help the drama texts translator to decode the message embedded in the socially and culturally tinted theatrical elements of the source text such as props, dressings, gestures, idioms and proverbs. The paper discusses the point that playwrights use language in a way that limits an overt understanding of complex sociological aspects, and argues that, the integrated cultural approach enables the source text elements to be mapped on the target text, such that, the settings and content of the source text are preserved in the target language culture for authenticity and acceptability.

Keywords—*Translation, language mechanism, semantics, culture, authenticity, acceptability*

I. Introduction

There is evidence to the fact that the language of drama differs from customary uses of language in quite fundamental ways as highlighted in [1]

To begin with, the Grician co-operative principle would appear to be in abeyance with literary writers that do not, for example, seem studiously to set much of a premium on perspicuity, but often seem studiously to avoid it. They are not, either, bound by any commitment to the truth of what they say; they are concerned only in that it should be convincing. And yet, if there is no cooperation on the part of the reader, then no meaning can be made out of literary text. It would seem that in reading literature, especially African drama texts, we are required to enter into a different kind of contractual agreement from the one we subscribe to in normal communicative circumstances. What then are the co-operative principles that control the functioning of literary discourse in African drama texts? If we do not read a lyric poem in the same way as a set of fire instructions, or a novel in the same way as an historical treatise or a textbook in sociology, then what is the difference in the way we interpret the linguistic sign in each case and specifically African drama texts?

II. Semiotics and the Construction of Meaning

The first move I want to make in the consideration of these questions is to press into service certain semiotic distinctions made by [1]. ArdÓ develops an elaborate and somewhat bewildering system for the description of sign, but within his system, and central to it, is a classification of three kinds of relationship between sign and object (between signifier and signified) which is of particular epistemological significance in African drama texts since it accounts for ways in which reality is conceptualized, codified, and therefore brought under control by the imposition of a sociolinguistic order. These categories, or mediators of meaning: the **symbol**, the **index**, and the **icon**.

Now Peirce's own description of the distinctive features of these sign-object relations is not entirely clear and I do not know how closely my own interpretation would accord with his intentions. But for the purposes of this exposition, it is convenient to characterize these different modes of signifying as follows:

The icon functions by virtue of a relationship of resemblance between sign and object as conventionally stated. Though by a conceptual virtue, the sign bears recognizable traces of perceptual experience. The index functions by virtue of a relationship of implication between sign and object, while the icon signals a representational relationship, the index signals a referential one. The symbol, to complete the triad, functions by virtue of an arbitrary agreement that sign should stand for an object. The symbol has no perceptual warrant but exists only by a kind of conventional conceptual contract. The relationship here is one of denotation with sensitive sociocultural frames embeddedness

Defined in this way, symbolic and iconic signs are both co-extensive with objects to which they relate sociologically or culturally, and so in some sense incorporate them. The index, on the other

hand, separates sign and object whereas, sign directs attention away from itself and serves as a clue to where the object is to be found elsewhere. It does not signal meaning by virtue of its own form. Reference, we may say, implies inference: representation and denotation do not. It follows that the index is dependent on a context to provide it with something to point to. The symbol and the icon, on the other hand, repose on notional conceptual conditions for meaning and are in this sense context free.

We may now turn from semiotics in general-to-general linguistics; the study of the linguistic sign. As defined by de Saussure, and the linguists following his work, this relates to reality in the manner of the symbol: the signifier is an arbitrary form which bears no resemblance to the object to which it relates. It denotes by convention. But we should notice that the linguistic sign is given symbolic status in African drama texts translation as a result of the linguist's idealization of language use, whereby he "removes it from its natural context of occurrence" [2]. Separated thus from its natural context of occurrences, the sign is then shown to contract relationships with other signs as terms in the system, rather than with other signs as object indicators. In this respect, the translator isolates the symbol artificially by methodological contrivance to give it a culturally framed meaning since the language of African drama texts is wrapped up in the sociology of its language construct. This is because in its natural surroundings, the linguistic sign functions not as a symbol but as an index. It is exploited by non-ideal speaker / listeners (and writers / readers) to connect with context and therefore to refer. We realize in this case that context is not to be thought of as an undifferentiated mass of amorphous reality but as a set of schemata which define conventionalized patterns of experience. Some linguists like [3] have referred to this concept of context of situation as a schematic

construct to apply to language events” solely at the discretion of the translator

III. Intertwining Language and Intercultural Acceptability

The preceding discourse underpins that in language use, the linguistic sign is interpreted indexically as a means of engaging with the schematic constructs of context. Where these constructs have to do with African drama texts translation, indexical interpretation results in the achievement of a reference. The veritable advantage with the integrated cultural approach is that, though the symbol denotes in its own character, the index can only refer when it is interpreted in relation to particular contexts which is evidently bound by cultural specificities. A common way of demonstrating this is to present passages of language that are symbolically clear but indexically obscure. Like the following, quoted in Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel*.

*Sooner than die away, my passion only Bred
itself upon each mouthful of Ground corn and
pepper I consumed.*

*Now, think child, would it be seemly
At my age, and the father of children
To be discovered, in public
Thrusting fistfuls of corn and pepper
In my mouth? ...*

(The Lion and the Jewel P. 45)

This passage presents no difficulty at all as far as symbolic meaning are concerned:

I will assume, from the lexical items’ procedure what *bred itself upon*, *mouthful*, and so on denote, and if one does not know, one can always find out by recourse to a dictionary:

Procedure: *regular order of doing things.*

Group: *number of persons or things gathered or placed together, or naturally associated. etc*

What you do not know is what these lexical items are referring to.

That is, one cannot interpret them as indices, so one does not know what the passage is about. Although it is incoherent as discourse, only

when a context or frame of reference is provided then can we make satisfactory sense of it; only then can we realize the indexical value of the signs. In this particular case, the context is provided by Barokas’ quest for Sidi, and Sidi’s embarrassment.

The index, then, is the linguistic unit of language use. Once it is realized through interpretation, reference is achieved. But reference must presuppose something, some object, some entity to refer to, something that can be identified as having independent existence. If we cannot discover the object which the sign relates to, then there is no indexical relationship and the expression fails to refer for us: it can then only be understood symbolically as a device for denotation.

By invoking these distinctions, we can say that, if the expression is understood as a sentence, then it is significant symbolically and it denotes a state of affairs which is not required to correspond to reality. If each symbol is in a manner sanctioned by syntactic rule, then the resulting expression is a significant sentence, and can be understood as such. If, however, we take this expression as an utterance, as an instance of language use, then the case is quite different. In respect to the fact that we require of the expression that it should be indexically significant, that it should refer; and if there is nothing for it to refer to, or if it refers to something we know to be non-existent, then it is indexically defective. In other words, the expression is significant as a string of symbols and is meaningful as a sentence by virtue of its denotation; it is not significant as an utterance because its indices indicate no corresponding object and so it fails to refer.

Taken as a sentence, then, the language of theatre has the same character as those which appear in textbooks of linguistics and language teaching. However, one would argue that such examples are symbolically well formed as sentences and so from the semantic point of view

are not norm-bound, if by semantics we mean, as linguists generally do seem to agree, the study of symbolic significance. The problem with such examples is that although the definite article and the simple present tense would naturally lead us to an indexical interpretation in relation to some context of shared knowledge or some context of immediate situation, these expressions in these cases actually direct us into a void. There is nothing beyond the expression to refer to. It is from the pragmatic point of view that they are nonsense. Whereas they are well-formed as sentences, but deviant as utterances.

Consider this sentence:

*By decree number one million and ninety-ten
... Yes one million and ninety-ten*

(Bate Besong, P.14)

Obviously, expressions of this kind are not intended to be interpreted as utterances. We are supposed to suppress our natural language instincts and simply process them as sentences. And the same condition is imposed on translators when they are confronted with similar expressions during a translation exercise. There are occasions, however, when expressions of the kind we have been considering are intended to provoke interpretation and are not just presented as sentences

In this case, the signs are not meant to denote, since the intention is to call up a particular state of affairs. But they do not refer either, since there is nothing in the immediate context for them to refer to. What we have here are signs of the third kind that pierce distinguished as the icon. Their function is not to denote or refer but to represent. And representation is the mode of meaning in literature.

IV. Essentialism for Referencing

It is therefore clear that the essential condition for reference is that there should be something to refer to, some object, entity or whatever within a context that is separate from the sign. To put the matter in another way, the

index has to have something to point to. With representation, context is necessarily created by the signs themselves and there are no objects, entities or whatever other than those conically represented by the signs. Reference is of its nature context-dependent, but representation, like denotation, signals self-contained meaning. It follows from this that whereas the same reference can be achieved by a variety of indexical expression-one can point at the same thing from different directions-meanings which are denoted and represented will be locked within particular forms so that when the form changes then different meanings will be signalled. This is exactly what we encounter in African drama texts

In conventional language use, the indexical interpretation of signs in utterances will commonly lead to the neutralization of differences which are, from a denotation point of view significant in that the index takes precedence over the symbol. But in the use of language in drama texts, these denotation differences are carried over and converted into different representations such as gestures, facial expressions costuming...

The distinction in the language dramatists use is given full representational force in that, every denotation distinction can be pressed into use as a cultural representation and the distinctions are significant and cannot be disregarded as if they were simply referential variants. Referential expressions in conventional discourse can be recast into a different form without loss of significance, but the representational expressions of literally discourse cannot. To paraphrase a metaphor, for example, is to shift from a representational mode of meaning to a referential one and to destroy its essential character. Poetic potency of a drama text can be rewritten in different terms in a different language but they cannot be translated. The iconic signs of the language of theatre are in this respect like the symbolic signs of the

language system: different forms directly signal different meanings, without connection with external context. They resemble indices, however, in that they are meant to be interpreted as use, but inadmissible in a consideration of symbolic meaning.

Consider, for example, the following expressions:

Yokoluka ha tan bi.

*Iyawo Yokoluka gb'oko san'le
oko yo'ke*

(The Lion and The Jewel P.44)

Taken as sentences, we note that these expressions denote a situation but mean nothing to us. Their denotation is clear in that they depict a cultural coded salutation which excludes any other person who does not share this referential meaning; It is for this reason that the French version does not have any translation for it.

V. The Dynamics of an Intercultural Approach

From an ethnological perspective, we have to interpret the expressions above as utterances, as instances of language use, and to do this, we have to realize them as representations. This involves the engagement of procedures we would normally apply to conventional referential uses of language (what is the point in saying that she sang and danced a maiden song while exhibiting her female beauty). But these procedures are directed now, not at recovering meaning in context within the culture, but at substituting meaning for communication purpose. The procedures have to seek significance therefore, in denotation and in sign patterns over and above their normal referential function. This is what the cultural approach seeks to establish.

By creating unique schemata which confer upon signs an additional dimension of meaning, drama texts translation turns to represents realities other than those conventionally referred to. The signs that are thus, as were, iconically

transmuted may be linguistic, as they commonly are in poetry, where metre, rhyme, alliteration, assonance, lexical and syntactic equivalences serve to fashion super imposed patterns of significance. In this case, the icon derives from the symbol. In dramatic language the signs are commonly those which have a standard referential significance and figure in cultural schemata: at this point, character, characteristics, roles, events, and so on, are fashioned into the underlying patterns of customary structures.

The reading of drama text and the realization of its representational mode of meaning calls for the deployment of interpretative procedures, not just for the discovery of meaning in context, but for the creation of contexts that define their own significance within each language community. As a consequence, the conditions for conventional indexical communication are no longer in force; the maxim of fidelity for example is strongly weakened with the hypothesis that since a drama text is literature, we do not expect that it should be true, but only that it should carry conviction. Indeed, if we interpreted it as being true, we would thereby be denying its literary character. The maxim of quantity is, again, continually flouted. Literary writers say more than would be necessary by referential effectiveness: why does Soyinka or Besong go on about local colours or abstruse style and rather adventurous use of dramatic techniques - a long-winded way instead of coming straight to the point and say what he is feeling? The answer is that literary writers say less than would be referentially acceptable, leaving us deliberately in the dark about their intended meanings and in general making a virtue of ambiguity.

VI. Conclusion

African drama texts as characterized by its natural ecosystem, is a curious hybrid mode of significance. On the one hand, it requires us to focus on the form of the signs, as if they were symbols, and on the other, it requires us to

engage interpretative procedures as if these signs were indices. Thus, African drama text translation forces us into a reappraisal of the nature of both sign and object; provides us with a fresh perspective on both language and social acceptability, infringes us with a fresh perspective on both language and life, and the interpretation of language and use as unique components in our various linguistic communities.

REFERENCES:

- [1] ArdÓ, Z., (2001). Emotions, Taboos
- [2] Bate Besong, (1998). Requiem for the Last Kaiser, Revised edition, Pressbook, Limbe.
- [3] Lefevere, A. (1992). Translation/History/Culture, London and New York, Routledge.
- [4] Wolé Soyinka, (1962) The Lion and the Jewel. Ibadan