

EXPLORING THE THEMES OF CONSTRAINTS AND CREATIVITY IN TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on constraints and creativity in translation. Due to the different constraints encountered by translators in their quest to convey a message from the source language into the target language, lack of creativity on the part of the translators may affect the quality of their end product. Therefore, in exploring the themes of constraints and creativity, the paper has endeavored looking into both linguistic and non-linguistic factors that pose challenges for translators and how different translation techniques can be used creatively to deal with these constraints. It is however important to note that these constraints have been categorized differently by different scholars and there seems to be no one rigid way of laying them out. The article has further highlighted some strategies/techniques that professional translators have had to use in order to bridge the cultural gap between the cultures under consideration, which in turn facilitates communication. Among the strategies used are: borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation, which have been seen to enhance creativity in translation. This study was guided by the textual analysis approach as it examined a text in English as well as its translated version in French. The parallel texts have been attached as annexes 1 and 2. From the findings of this study, it is lucid to argue that translation and culture are inextricably intertwined and it is no wonder many constraints in translation emanate from cultural variations. This therefore calls for translators to reconcile their translation purpose and function with their intended audience as well as the text genres before embarking on any translation task. The importance of creativity in translating cannot be overemphasized as it is evident in the annexes attached that the translator of the COMESA Newsletter was an expert with a creative mind.

KEYWORDS: Constraints in Translation, Creativity in translation, Linguistic factors, Case study, COMESA Newsletter

1. INTRODUCTION

Darwish (1999: 19) defines translation constraint as “any factor in the translation process that limits the realization of an optimally approximated translation, be it at the micro level or macro level”. In other words, constraints influence negatively the act of translating. According to Jones (2014:41) “constraints stem from one of the three things: semantic, structural or metalinguistic obstacles standing in the way of a word for word translation”. Hence the need for creativity on the part of the translator in order to find acceptable solutions that will accommodate every identified obstacle. Almanna (2013:28) emphasises the fact that “constraints offer translators opportunities to enhance their creativity in translation” in the sense that constraints will lead the translator to adopt the most

appropriate strategy or strategies, and this is healthy for creative writing. In the same vein, Munday (2012: 227) indicates that “creativity of translation is a growing theme and the crossover between translation studies and creative writing has begun to be explored”. In this paper we look at the following sub topics: The Methodology, Constraints frequently encountered in Translation, The need for creativity in translation, Strategies used to enhance creativity in translation, Case study of the translated foreword, COMESA newsletter, December, 2014 and finally a brief summary.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study was guided by the textual analysis approach. It examined a text published in English and its equivalent translation in French. The two parallel texts are both extracts from the COMESA Newsletter volume 2 that was published in December 2014 in English and in French. The two versions have been attached to this article as annexes.

3.0 CONSTRAINTS FREQUENTLY ENCOUNTERED IN TRANSLATION

Scholars in the field of translation studies have identified two types of obstacles to translation: verbal and non-verbal constraints (Almanna, 2013:27). Verbal constraints are text-driven, while non-verbal constraints are caused by extra-linguistic factors such as cultures, the translation purpose, the audience and the power patronage. Non-verbal constraints emanate from cultural differences and, therefore would require solutions during the process of translating.

According to the classification proposed by Lefèvre (1992) and cited by Almanna (2013:28), there are four (4) categories of constraints in translation. The first category includes extra-linguistic constraints. The second concerns norm imposed constraints. The third covers translator-related constraints, while the fourth and last category encompasses text-driven constraints. Lefèvre (ibid) explains that text driven constraints are to do with stylistics, linguistics, communicative pragmatics and textual linguistics. Linguistic constraints include syntactic and semantic obstacles. As Jackendoff (1991:96) cited by As-Safi (2015) indicates, “Once one understands the meaning, the syntax follows naturally and automatically”. Research has shown that different languages have different grammatical structures and word order. In addition, every language has specific idiomatic expressions and set phrases that may not be found in other languages. Jones (2014:43) adds that linguistic constraints should also include difficulties encountered by translators due to polysemous words and deceptive cognates.

Extra-linguistic constraints include, as earlier stated, the purpose of translating, the intended audience, the text genre as well the text types. It has been argued that failure to identify these details impact negatively on the process of translation. As Almanna (2013:29) stresses, “Translators do not work randomly, but are influenced by particular constraints that are of extra linguistic nature”. Some scholars also consider briefs as belonging to the category of extra linguistic constraints. The researchers’ argument is based on the fact that the translators are obliged to comply with the translation briefs provided by their client, agent, publisher or translation project manager.

Norm-imposed obstacles and translator-related difficulties also belong to the category of extra linguistic constraints. Suffice it to say that every translator has his own limitations in terms of competence, idiolect, habitus and ideology. Norm-imposed constraints often stem from expectancy, communication norms, relation norms and accountability to the translation Commissioner. According to Baker (2011:302), “The constraints are normally formulated by the Commissioner and specified in the translation brief”.

4.0 THE NEED FOR CREATIVITY IN TRANSLATION

The process of conveying the Source Language message into the Target Language has been described as a creative act due to numerous constraints that translators encounter in their attempt to produce an acceptable target text that readers may consider as equivalent to the source text. Translators need to expertly and creatively provide a solution to perceived obstacles to the transcoding process. Jones (2014: 41) argues that “to counter these problems one can resort to a certain number of techniques which will help” produce a target text that will be as good as the original. The translator’s ability to achieve a satisfactory result, despite the presence of many constraints, is what contemporary scholars in the field translation studies will describe as creativity. In this respect, “The complex and creative process of adapting one text into a new reality, mediating between your source and target language insinuates that a translator’s task is not only an intricate and demanding one, but highly creative” (www.GLOBALME.NET). In other words, translators are expected to be creative in their quest to provide solutions to context problems. Munday (2012: 302) adds that “The constraints of the TT are the general extra linguistic factors that guide or determine some of the translator’s decisions”. Therefore, constraints, whether verbal or non-verbal, create an atmosphere that is conducive for the translator to enhance creativity, as the obstacles offer the translator some freedom to choose the most appropriate procedures or techniques.

5.0 STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE CREATIVITY IN TRANSLATION

Jones (2014:41) describes a translation strategy as “a strategy to help translators find a solution to a particular problem”. In other words, translation techniques enhance creativity in translator. Languages have particular preferences for certain syntactical constructions. This entails that constructions are not the same in all languages as they vary from one language to another. For instance, romance languages such as French, Spanish and Italian may not follow the same patterns as Germanic languages. They differ considerably in grammar and syntax. Consequently, “to come up with an equivalent message in the Target language, the translator must think of what is commonly said under the same circumstances, and in the same situation (ibid: 118). English, for instance, is said to be more synthetic and therefore easier to read and understand compared to French and Portuguese whose structures are said to be complicated. The English language is easier simply because it prefers lexical simplification, unlike the Romance languages which have a tendency towards flowery expressions and complicated syntactical patterns and structures. Hervey (1992:58) says that “whenever the grammatical structures of the ST cannot be matched by the analogous structures in TT, the translator is faced with the prospect of major translation losses”; Hence, the need for more

creativity on the part of the translator, .Where there is creativity, the translator will not be criticized for producing ugly and unfaithful texts. The content and beauty of the source text will be preserved in the target text as far as possible and the translator will continue being viewed as a bridge builder enabling communication between cultures.

The following procedures have often been used by professional translators to provide solutions constraints in translation: Borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation. Borrowing is a type direct translation which does not preclude creativity and it is used to overcome a lacuna in the target language. In other words, borrowing is actually a direct transfer of the source language word into the target language. According to Venuti (1999: 85), “In order to introduce the flavour of the source language culture into a translation, foreign terms may be used”. Calque is another type of direct translation procedure. It is also another form of borrowing. Calque is special because the translator borrows an expression form, rather than lifting a foreign word, and then translates each of its elements literally. The third technique under direct translation is literal translation. It is frequently used when the Source language and the target language share the same culture. It is also commonly referred to as word for word translation. While literal translation may work in some situations, it may not work in other situations.

According to Venuti (1999:87), a translator can only “turn to the methods of oblique translation” if the first three procedures above, under direct translation, are unacceptable or not satisfactory. Oblique translation includes transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation. Transposition is a technique that “involves replacing one word class with another without changing the meaning of the message (ibid: 88). As for modulation, it is described by Venuti as “a variation of the form of the message, obtained by a change in the point of view”. The third technique under oblique translation is known as equivalence and is mostly used to translate idiomatic expressions, proverbs and set phrases. A translator can effectively use this technique for as long as he or she has access to good reference works and monolingual dictionaries of idioms or, better still, is able to consult native speakers” (Baker, 2011:69). The fourth technique under this series of oblique translation procedures is adaptation. It is a special kind of equivalence which is effectively used in situations where the source language expression or word is unknown in the target language culture. Consequently, the translator is free to create a new situation that the intended may understand and consider as equivalent.

6.0 CASE STUDY OF THE TRANSLATED FOREWORD, COMESA NEWSLETTER, DECEMBER, 2014

In this section of the essay, we critically examine a parallel corpus consisting of a text in English and its translated version in French. The original text in English is the Foreword to a COMESA newsletter that was published in 2014. COMESA is the acronym for ‘Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa’. COMESA has four working languages, namely, English, French, Portuguese and Arabic. We deliberately chose to analyse the English and French versions. Both the English and

French texts have been attached to this assignment as annexes. Annex 1 is the Foreword of the Newsletter, volume 2, in English. Annex 2 is Avant-propos, the French translated version of the Foreword. Our analysis focused on key possible constraints in the original text and the techniques that the translator employed to produce a target text that is as good as the source text. It takes a creative and professional mind to produce optimum translation.

In paragraph 1, first sentence, the theme “2014 Africa Year of Agriculture and Food Security” was translated as “2014, Année de l’agriculture et de la sécurité alimentaire en Afrique”. Because of structural similarities that exist between English and French, the translator chose to use the technique of Calque, meaning that the translator borrowed the structural form of the English version and translated every element word for word. Literal translation would have sounded extremely awkward and not suitable for a Newsletter of international status. The translation has been so expertly done that it would be difficult for any ordinary person to tell which one of the two versions is the original one as they both look original. In the same sentence, “Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme has been translated as “Programme détaillé pour le développement de l’agriculture africaine”. One of the techniques used here is transposition as the Proper Noun ‘Africa’ has been replaced by an adjective ‘africaine’ in the French text. Further, the translator opted to use calque to translate the whole phrase. From the stylistic point of view, the translated version looks attractive. Literal translation could have attracted criticism as the target text would have sounded amateurish. The sentence “cet événement a permis de renouveler” reveals some kind of creativity and ingenuity on the part of the translator. Where the source used the definite article ‘le’, the translator has used the demonstrative adjective ‘cet’. Furthermore, we can also notice the use of modulation. “The event witnessed ...” has been translated here as “cet événement a permis...”). There is certainly creativity here as the translator deliberately avoided using the literal translation procedure. Modulation can be defined as a technique which changes the semantic point of view. In the same paragraph, the past participle ‘renewed’ appears as an infinitive verb in the French version. It takes a creative mind to do transposition as it would have been simpler to employ literal translation. The verb ‘to move’ has been replaced by a set phrase ‘à faire passer’ in the French version. We would call technique transposition. It is important for us to note that the translation of paragraph 1 has been so elegantly and expertly done that we can acknowledge the creativity of the translator; we are therefore persuaded that there is a link between constraints and creativity. The translation of Paragraph one also show that the work was done by a person who has good understanding of both cultures, namely, the source language culture as well as the target language culture. The translator shows that he or she has broad knowledge of the grammar of both English and French. In addition, the translation of paragraph 1 also reveals that the translator has grammatical competence. This kind of competence includes knowledge of the rules, knowledge of the vocabulary, knowledge of the word formation, knowledge of the spellings as well as knowledge of the sentence structures (syntax). The translator has faithfully conveyed the message contained in the English source text into a linguistically, emotionally, tonally and culturally equivalent French target text. Paragraph 2 consists of two long sentences. The first sentence,

“Reaffirming the Maputo Declaration targets, the Heads of State and Government further came up with the 2014 Malabo Declaration with new targets and commitments aimed at sustaining the CAADP Momentum for the next decade”

has been translated as:

“Réaffirmant les objectifs de la Déclaration de Maputo, les chefs d’Etat et de gouvernement ont fait la Déclaration de Malabo de 2014, laquelle contient des objectifs et des engagements nouveaux visant à soutenir la dynamique du PDDAA au cours des dix prochaines années”

A close look at the version shows that the translator employed the calque as the main procedure to translate the whole sentence above. The word ‘further’ in the English version has not been translated in the French version, implying that there is a certain ‘loss’ in the French version. However, the translator’s ingenuity and creativity have been equal to the task. We see that the loss has somehow been compensated by using the term ‘dynamique’. The translator has also used other techniques make sure there is no loss of meaning. Transposition has been used to translate the expression ‘with new targets and commitments’, which in French reads ‘laquelle contient des objectifs et engagements’. Transposition has also been used to translate the word ‘with’ in the phrase “with lessons learnt”. The past participle ‘renewed’ has been replaced by the adjective ‘nouveaux’ in the French version. There is also transposition in the translation of the expression “aim at sustaining” which has been translated as “visant à soutenir”. There is modulation in the expression “aimed to focus” which in French has become “permettront de se focaliser”. Literal translation has been used to translate “the Heads of State and Government” to read “les chefs d’Etat et de gouvernement”. In addition, we see some creativity on the part of the translator in the translation of the word ‘target’ which has been translated as ‘objectifs’ instead of ‘cibles’. Consequently, the expression “Declaration targets” has been translated as “objectifs de la déclaration”. The translator has creatively dealt with the obstacle of polysemy in the word ‘cible’.

The translation of paragraph 3 equally shows signs of ingenuity and creativity. The translation of the first sentence, for instance, shows that the translator is very familiar with the target language culture. We can see how he manages to convey the message from the source language into the target language using the appropriate expressions. He uses a combination of calque and literal translation. In addition, we can also see that the translator is not only familiar with the topic, but also the register in both languages. This is what the Scholar As-Safi (2015:8) describes as “bicultural competence”. We can further see this expertise in the way the expression “by 2025” has been translated to read “à l’horizon 2025”. “Through inclusive agriculture growth and transformation” has been intelligently translated as “grâce à la croissance et à la transformation inclusive de l’agriculture”. Even though literal translation was used, the end result is an acceptable translatum.

We see similar ingenuity in paragraph 4 where the expression “with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) ending in 2015” has been expertly translated as “Eu égard au fait que les objectifs du millénaire pour le développement (OMD) arrivent à leur terme”. The translator could have chosen to use literal translation all the way, but he used his creative mind to add flavour to the French text. The word focus in the expression “framework of focus” could be described as a deceptive cognate which an amateur translator could have used using a different expression. It has been expertly translated as “cadre intervention”. Transposition was used to translate the gerund “ending” using a befitting idiomatic expression “arrivent à leur terme”.

Paragraph 5, which is the last paragraph of the foreword, contains very few constraints or obstacles; as a result, the translator has relied on literal translation to convey the source text message. There is however a case of modulation in the translation of the expression “we look forward to” which has been translated as “nous attendons avec intérêt”. One thing worthy noting in the paragraph is the signature. Whereas the name of the signatory comes before the name of the organisation, the opposite is true in the French version where the name of the organisation precedes the name of the signatory. This kind of ending is a typical example of cultural variations.

7.0 CONCLUSION

This paper has clearly shown that culture is inseparable from translation and that many constraints in translation emanate from cultural differences. This probably explains why translators do not work randomly, but rather make an effort to identify the translation purpose and function, the intended readership, as well as the text genres and types before they can proceed to undertake any translation. The translation of the COMESA Newsletter was seemingly done by an expert with a creative mind. As a result, it is easy for an ordinary reader to indicate the source text. The only we have is that the current Secretary General of Comesa is Anglophone. It is that prior knowledge which helped to conclude that the French version was the target version. The analysis of this parallel corpus has also led us to confirm that French texts tend to be longer than the English ones.

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TRANSLATION RESOURCES

- Bab.la – <https://en.bab.la/dictionary/french-english/etre-en-litige>
- Le grand Dictionnaire terminologique (GDT). www.granddictionnaire.ca
- Linguee.com
- Linguee.fr
- Multilingual portal for glossaries.
- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. Oxford University Press.
- [Www.wordreference.com/fren/litige](http://www.wordreference.com/fren/litige).
- www.globalme.NET. Last updated on April 10 2018

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: FOREWORD (ENGLISH)

Source: Comesa Newsletter Vol. 2 December 2014 (English Version)

1. The June 2014 Malabo Summit held under the theme of “ 2014 Africa Year of Agriculture and Food security” was a celebration of a decade of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). The event witnessed renewed commitments and resolve by African Heads of State and Government to move the CAADP agenda to the next level.
2. Reaffirming the Maputo Declaration targets, the Heads of State and Government further came up with the 2014 Malabo Declaration with new targets and commitments aimed at sustaining the CAADP Momentum for the next decade. With lessons learnt and shared for the past 10 years, the renewed commitments and targets aim to focus on results and impact for the next 10 years.
3. Notable among the renewed commitments set out in the 2014 Malabo Declaration include; enhancing investment financing in Agriculture, ending hunger and halving poverty by 2025 through inclusive agriculture growth and transformation.
4. With the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015, the Malabo Declaration targets provides a framework of focus for poverty alleviation and ending hunger across the continent through agriculture led development for the next decade (2015-2025).
5. This December 2014 COMESA CAADP Newsletter is meant to communicate and share information with our stakeholders on COMESA's contribution to the continental agenda of a poverty free Africa. We look forward to more fruitful partnerships and collaboration with stakeholders in the New Year 2015. We further invite feedback from stakeholders as we continue to dialogue.

Sindiso Ngwenya

COMESA SECRETARY GENERAL

ANNEX 2: AVANT PROPOS (FRENCH)

Source: Comesa Newsletter Vol. 2 December 2014 (English Version)

1. Organisé autour du thème « 2014, Année de l'agriculture et de la sécurité alimentaire en Afrique », le Sommet de Malabo tenu en juin 2014 a été l'occasion de célébrer dix années de mise en œuvre du programme détaillé pour le développement de l'agriculture africaine (PDDAA). Cet événement a permis de renouveler l'engagement et la détermination des chefs d'Etat et de gouvernement à faire passer le PDDAA à l'étape suivante.
2. Réaffirmant les objectifs de la Déclaration de Maputo, les chefs d'Etat et de gouvernement ont fait la Déclaration de Malabo de 2014, laquelle contient des objectifs et des engagements nouveaux visant à soutenir la dynamique du PDDAA au cours des dix prochaines années. S'appuyant sur les renseignements tirés et partagés au cours de la décennie écoulée, les engagements et les objectifs nouveaux permettront de se focaliser sur les résultats et l'impact au cours des dix prochaines années.
3. Au nombre des engagements renouvelés énoncés dans la Déclaration de Malabo 2014 figurent notamment la promotion du financement de l'investissement dans l'agriculture, l'éradication de la faim et la réduction de la pauvreté de moitié à l'horizon 2025 grâce à la croissance et à la transformation inclusives de l'agriculture.
4. Eu regards au fait que les objectifs du Millénaire pour le développement (OMD) arrivent à leur terme en 2015, la Déclaration de Malabo offre un cadre d'intervention essentiel pour la réduction de la pauvreté et l'éradication de la famine sur le continent grâce à un développement axé sur l'agriculture au cours de la prochaine décennie (2015-2025).
5. Ce numéro de la lettre d'information a pour but de communiquer aux parties prenantes et de partager avec elles l'information sur la contribution du COMESA au programme continental d'une Afrique sans pauvreté. Nous attendons avec intérêt des rapports de partenariat et une collaboration encore plus fructueuse avec les parties prenantes au cours de la nouvelle année 2015 et les invitons à nous faire part de leurs réflexions à mesure que se poursuit le dialogue.

Secrétaire général du COMESA

Sindiso Ngwenya