

Translating ‘Hybrid Literature’ in a Globalized World**Linguistics**

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Abstract

Translation has never been only a matter of words. For this reason, trying to find the perfect one will lead to frustration. Nowadays we are living in a globalized world where communication, depending on its use, can be both a very useful tool and a weapon of destruction. It is the time when we assume the conquest of freedom of speech while we do not listen to the ‘Other’. There are more and more rising voices trying to express what they kept when they were forced to be silent, even reinventing languages and creating new ones. It is high time to discover cultures through the languages, to express feelings shared by two countries and nationalities, to claim what is fair. It is the communication revolution but, can it really take place in a globalized world where the most developed countries continue trying to impose their speech? How can the translator express in a new language what he has never felt?

Globalization and translation

The global area conception of the world is not something new. Globalization stopped being a futurist theory for some time and came true. In the majority of cases, this phenomenon is studied based on its financial interest. However, I want to focus in his cultural consequences, in which is nowadays called global culture or interconnected network of local cultures.

Many are the authors who consider that the knowledge will be the greatest resource in a globalized world. However, it does not mean that all the effects are going to be positive. According to Jorge Arnoletto (2007), there are three main consequences of cultural impacts such as globalization. On the one hand, we witness the emergence of a global culture, which is usually based on the most developed cultures, the ones that are at the same time benefited from this phenomenon. On the other hand, as a result, it gives a resurgence of the local cultures, which do not agree with it and fight to claim their own characteristics. And last but not least, this phenomenon means an important redefinition of time and space notions, which promotes an even more notable difference between western cultures.

In this aspect, it is interesting to underline the connection between the process of globalization in a cultural level and translation, in terms of ethical translation above all. Anthony Burgess, assured that “translation is not a matter of words only: it is a matter of making intelligible a whole culture” (1984: 4 *apud* Anderman and Rogers 1999: 124). This idea is enforced by Chloe Signès (2016), who considers that

we must keep on researching and spreading concrete results in order to find the way towards a truly ethical and dialogical translation practice, taking into account the fact that both writing and translating are subtle and paradoxical tasks which require acceptance of the imperfect dimension of language.

While translating requires taking into account several pragmatic, cultural and social aspects, communicating in other language the author intention in these cases implies an unimaginable challenge, not only relating the linguistics, but also the context, because the writers are looking for a representation of their cultures and villages. For this reason, and according to Salman Rushdie, it is not surprising

that the word translation comes, etymologically, from the Latin for bearing across. Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately to the notion that something can also be gained.

In this global context, the translation has been necessary for the representation of the African cultures in an international level as well as for the key to establish the relation between both sides (the oppressors and the oppressed) in the process of settlements, “a vertical translation practice, based on unequal power relations, between European and African language cultures. In this vertical relationship, translation became much more than a mere exchange of cultures or texts, and assumed an ideological basis” (Bandia 2009:5 *apud* Rodríguez 2015: 19). Western countries used to receive a modified image of the ‘Other’, an image which had passed through the filter and did not reflect the reality of the African continent. For this reason, in the postcolonial period, the writers born in the former colonies use the same tool to represent now their own realities. “Translation therefore becomes the means for writers on the periphery to deal with the distance and decentring imposed upon them by hegemonic cultures” (Bandia 2009b: 13 *apud* Rodríguez 2015: 21).

It is very important then to recognize the effort, and almost the duty, of the translator as a different culture promoter. If in the past translation was a tool responding to ‘Empire’ orders (1989), now it should help to understand differences and respect them, as well as changing the world and renewing international politics with this aim. In the case of African literature more precisely, Signès stated that “dealing with ‘African’ literatures from the perspective of translation, with the tools available in a discipline which has enlarged its scope and multiplied its potential approaches is an enriching experience which reveals the deep asymmetries of a globalized society”(2016). Which for Elena Rodríguez Murphy means “traducir la diferencia sin marcar lo diferente, [de] permitir el encuentro con el Otro, [de] facilitar el acceso a esa tercera cultura que intenta hacerse a través del texto traducido”(2010)¹.

¹ ERM (2010): “to translate the difference without showing what is different, to allow to meet the ‘Other’, to enable the access to this third culture which tries to find its place through the translated text”.

Hybrid literature and Rotten English

We can not go further and analyze deeply the translation of this kind of novels if we do not explain before the meaning of ‘hybrid literature’, in this case, focusing on the one written by Africans using the ‘colonial’ language. In fact, several of them used the translation to tell their experiences with this language. For this reason, and from the point of view of the translator, it is absolutely clear that, as mentioned above, the translation of these heteroagenic texts entails ethical and linguistics dilemmas for him, who will have to go further and translate all the explicit and implicit elements that the author reflected in the source production.

Even nowadays authors and publishing houses do not agree on how to categorize this authors. The final decision is sometimes based on the success of the novel, which brings us to the beginning of this article and the prevalence of economics over culture. In this context, Signès (2016) explained:

What are then the criteria that should be applied here? The place of birth of the authors? The color of their skin? The country in which they publish their books? The themes of their novels? Accurately defining what is understood by ‘African literature(s)’, although using here a more welcoming plural voice, is so hard that no consensus has been reached. However, what I want to highlight here is the fact that, already well into the 21st century, the paradoxical situations that have been described reveal the identity discomfort of our globalized society, as well as the strength of the western clichés on the ‘Dark Continent’. Clearly, national categorizations, let alone continental ones, cannot account for the multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural diversity or reality in which we live.

These writers make an special use of the English keeping the African nuance, not only relating the subject but also the linguistics. However, the adaptation of this language to the African context does not mean that those writers are not able to master the colonial language.

So my answer to the question, can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing? is certainly yes. [...] The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use. The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience (Achebe 1965: 29 *apud* Rodríguez 2015: 24).

Some of these authors face a linguistic, political and personal dilemma when they use the colonial language. Maybe that is the reason why they africanize it through the rythme, register, pronunciation and vocabulary, using particularly their oral narratives. Some other time, the cause

may be that they want it to be a vehicle of ideas of their culture that has no equivalent in the other language, which is a good example of the intercultural treasure of the regions where they come from.

If translation has always been a powerful tool to represent the African history, more has it been in the postcolonial period, mainly in the sixties, where literature helped to give voice to the oppressed. “La literatura africana es una de las literaturas en las que la elección de la lengua más implicaciones políticas ha tenido desde siempre, sobre todo por las actitudes de los escritores africanos hacia las lenguas europeas” (Vidal 2010: 58)².

In this process of understanding the ‘Other’ and translating a culture, we can not forget, particularly in the case of the novels written by hybrid authors, the importance of Rotten English. The language is an important tool whilst it represents reality. For this reason, the writer Ken Saro-Wiwa created a ‘language’ for the marginalized to have a voice and a identity in his novel *Sozaboy*. This combinaison of Nigerian pidgin English, broken English and idiomatic English called ‘Rotten English’ by him, helped him to overcome ethnic and cultural barriers because he used it to criticize both parties involved in the Nigerian civil war. Michael North defined it as “a hybridized, syncretic language, which proposes a Nigeria that is not divided along ethnic and linguistic lines [...]” (2001: 109 *apud* Gunn, Jeffrey 2008: 3). “Rotten English creates a level playing field where minority groups are heard alongside majority groups in a ‘relational’ fashion” (Britton 1999: 11 *apud* Gunn, Jeffrey 2008: 3).

Most researchers consider that, even if the language and the history form a perfect match, the burden is on the first of them, which sends the author’s message and leaves uncertainly in the mind of the reader. As mentioned above and to sum up, this language represents the new power relations between ethnic minorities and nation states (Kappelman 2001 *apud* Gunn, Jeffrey 2008: 4). Taking as an example the novel *Beasts of no nation* by Uzodinma Iweala for visually elucidating this idea, it is obvious that most of the proceedings to get this effect are closely linked to vocabulary. The author uses word plays mixing both languages, repeats synonyms of a field of lexicon and expresses himself sometimes with colloquial terms, which may remind him his hybrid childhood. However, he also takes a chance of grammar, taking, and I say taking and not writing, with simple tenses, as well as uses grammatical and lexical disagreements, trying to induce a sense of ‘strangeness’ when it is read, the same sense which must be translated and which could reflect its own place in society.

Conclusions

Translating ‘hybrid literature’ goes further than mastering a language. The translator must understand a whole culture, and the social and historical background in which it has been written.

² AFV (2010): “African literature is one of the literatures in which the language choice has had the most political implications since ever, because of the attitude of the African writers to the European languages, above all”.

He must be able to put himself in another's position and feel what is hidden behind the words, more than translating them literally. What is the most difficult in a more and more globalized world is to respect and place value on the minorities because they have to face a powerful majority more interested in economic values. It is there where the translator becomes essential and an ethical key to understand the 'Other'.

In the case of African history more precisely, citizens have always been submitted and they see the self-determination as a instrument against the former Empire. They do not write this way looking for a reparation, they just want to raise their voices and make us listen to what they feel and who they are. And it is our ethical obligation as translators to spread that message further across.

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