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Translating Rwandan folktales into English: a culture-based analysis

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CONCLUSION

In this study, I have discussed, in the first place, the relationship between folklore, language, culture and translation and I have shown the reasons why the translator should take into account both source and target cultures when he embarks on translating folklore in general and folktales in particular. In the second place, as this study was concerned with translating Rwandan folktales for an international audience in general and children in particular, I have also discussed issues related to translating for children. Finally, I have analysed four Rwandan folktales with a view to identifying culture-specific problems that may arise when the translator embarks on translating Rwandan folktales into English and have proposed some strategies that may be used to solve such problems. One of these folktales has been translated into English and strategies used to solve culture-specific problems that it contains have also been discussed.

Folklore is related to culture in the sense it is the mirror of culture because it relates to the ceremonies, institutions, crafts and so on of the people who produce it. Moreover, it expresses their beliefs, their customs and their attitudes. As pointed out, folklore gives a penetrating picture of the way of life of the people who produce it.

Language and culture are also related in two respects: language as a mirror of culture and as an integral part of culture as well. I pointed out the fact that language reflects the culture of the people who use it and it is better understood with reference to that culture.

As to the relationship between culture and translation, it was pointed out that it is of considerable importance in translation because translating involves the consideration of the source and target language cultures. Translation is now viewed as a cultural or a crosscultural transfer. It is defined as a means of intercultural communication, a means to make up for cultural differences.

The discussion dealing with translating for children centred on children's literature and its translation and on folktales as a genre that is part of literature in general and as one of the major component of children's literature in particular. I have pointed out two main objectives of translating for children, namely to make more literature available to children and to further the international outlook and understanding of the young readers. I have also discussed some particular problems that the translator may encounter when translating for children and some particular methods that may be used to solve such problems. These methods, even though not particular to solving problems arising when translating for

children only, include, among many others, cultural context adaptation, language adaptation, modernization, purification and abridgement.

In the third chapter, which is the core of this study, I analysed the sample folktales and culture-specific problems were brought to the fore. Generally speaking, these problems arise from the fact Rwandan folklore, Rwandan culture and Kinyarwanda are related in the same sense as any other folklore, language and culture of any other people are related. Rwandan folktales, which constitute the genre of folklore analysed to identify problems that the translator may encounter when he embarks on translating Rwandan folktales into English, contain Rwandan culture-related elements that should be taken into account. The most important problems identified in this study are in relation with the differences in the structure, characterization and setting of Rwandan folktales. Other problems discussed are related to Rwandans' way of life.

As far as the problems related to the structure of Rwandan folktales are concerned, they lie in the fact that Rwandan folktales have, in addition to the usual introductory and closing formulae, optional formulae which can either precede the opening formula or follow the closing formula. These formulae cause problems because these extended versions are typical of the Rwandan folktale. The problem lies in that, while most cultures have equivalents for the usual closing and opening formulae, they do not have any for the extended versions. The translator has, thus, to make decisions as to how to translate them.

As for problems related to characterization, it was found that the main problem lies in adapting characters in Rwandan folktales to the target culture. Some characters are typical of Rwandan culture and the roles they perform may be performed by different characters in other cultures. This is the case with proper names of people which cannot be translated, roles that some animal and object characters play in Rwandan culture while the same roles are played by different animals and objects in other cultures and the features that are attributed to each character which may be different from features attributed to it in other cultures. In fact, this is a functional equivalence problem.

The problem related to setting that was identified is that Rwandan folktales are set in Rwanda and Kinyarwanda names of places come into play when it comes to placing the story in place. However, names of places in Kinyarwanda do not have their equivalents in English.

With regard to problems in connection with the way of life, the most striking lie in translating traditional items of clothing, food and drinks, cattle-related vocabulary, style of home building, social organization, and beliefs and customs. Traditional Rwandan items of clothing were made from material which is different from the material which modern items are made from. They were made of animal skins and barks of or fibres from trees. They do not have, therefore, equivalents in English. Translation problems related to food and drinks are due to the fact Rwandans do not use the same dishes as those of other people of other cultures. They also use different ingredients to prepare drinks. As for problems in connection with cattle-related vocabulary, they are due to the fact that Rwandans have a wide range of vocabulary related to cattle. Those identified in the folktales that were analysed relate to the names given to cows on the basis of their colours. As far as style-of-home-building-related problems are concerned, they arise from the fact the traditional hut was designed in a way that is different from the way modern houses are and its parts were given names that do not match the parts of modern houses. In addition, the roof of the traditional hut was held up by a number of pillars which had special names. The problem encountered in translating these names is that some societies do not use pillars to hold the roofs of their houses or, if they do, they may not give a name to each pillar as Rwandans did. Rwandans' social organisation may also be referred to in folktales and aspects that relate to it may cause problems because it is different from social organisation of other societies. For instance, the king, in Rwanda, was so powerful that he had the right of life and death over his subjects and everything in his kingdom was his. Moreover, every person was to be under contract with another person of a higher social class. If the translator who wants to translate Rwandan folktales is not aware of the way the Rwandan society was traditionally organized both socially and administratively, there may be a problem of understanding them in their cultural context.

To solve these problems, the translator should use some strategies which may vary according to the type of problems to be solved, the purpose of translating and the audience the target text is intended for. When translating Rwandan folktales for an international audience with a view to promoting Rwandan folktales in their cultural context, I have proposed that the above problems be solved as follows:

The usual opening and closing formulae of Rwandan folktales should be rendered by their equivalents in English. The extended versions, however, for lack of equivalents in English, should be translated as literally as possible in order to retain their cultural context

originality. Problems related to characters can be solved by retaining people's proper names, and retaining animal and object characters. Footnotes or endnotes can be used to give further cultural explanations. The problems resulting from differences in the way of life, different strategies may be used according to each kind of problem. To translate items of clothing, the translator may use paraphrases, describing what they look like and stating the material they are made of. Names of dishes and drinks may also be translated by means of paraphrases. Names of different pillars and other words related to ancient home building can be solved by translating such words with reference either to their functions or location. Words or concepts related to social organisation and beliefs and customs would be literally translated in order to preserve them as they are viewed in Rwandan culture. If possible, the translator may also provide pictures or drawings of some objects like a water pot, a milk pot, a traditional stool and so on.

These are some culture-related problems identified in the four folktales that this study is concerned with and possible strategies that the translator may use to solve them. However, I cannot claim to have dealt with all the problems that may arise when translating Rwandan folktales into English or any other language or all possible solutions. Further studies may be carried out to identify more culture-specific problems present in other folktales. In addition, further studies on translating from Kinyarwanda texts in general and Rwandan folktales in particular into English may deal with the following:

- Lexical equivalence problems and solutions
- Grammatical equivalence problems and solutions
- Functional equivalence problems and solutions

In addition, further studies may be directed towards translating Rwandan folktales into English for specific audiences and for different purposes. One may, for instance, carry out a study on how to translate Rwandan folktales for Rwandan children for educational purposes. This is of considerable importance because it could be one of the ways of putting at the school children's disposal some reading material that is set in Rwandan context.

