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Ideology in the French translation of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's children's books

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2006-10-25T12:16:24Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/1438

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Introduction

Aim, motivation, definition of key concepts and structure of the work

Aim

The aim is framed by the investigation of whether or not an approach taking into consideration ideological issues is appropriate in translating Ngugi's children's books for a Francophone child reader.

To achieve this aim several translations of extracts from Ngugi's children books are compared. The translations of these extracts are carried out in different *socio-cultural contexts* by translators of different origins (France and Cameroon). It is not the intention of this study to set norms for translating for children but to try to understand what processes or strategies are at work in translating for children. Thus, translation is dealt with as cross-cultural communication. In other words this comparison demonstrates the *changes* occurring in the translation process.

Motivation

The fact that children's literature is neglected in some French speaking African countries, the difficulties of building bridges between children of different countries, and the need to translate the few African children's books available have all prompted this study of the translation of Ngugi's children's books.

The significance of Ngugi's storybooks in Kenya cannot be disputed. Why else would these books first published in 1982 and 1984 continue to be reprinted? Kenyan schools admit their positive influence. Acknowledged to have merit by the East African Educational Publishers in their imagination and verbal artistry, we have selected them for the purpose of this work for this reason.

Translated from Gĩkũyũ[1] into English by Wangũi wa Goro, the popularity of these children's texts is attested by their editions, which have appeared in recent years in a number of neighbouring countries, including Uganda and Tanzania. It may be that the immediate, actual geographical proximity of these countries to Kenya facilitates the exchange of books. Perhaps the theme of war (fight for freedom) described in these stories is easily related to the warlike conditions in which many African children now live. There are Njamba Nenes (child (ren) soldier(s)) all over Africa involved in civil wars, which may be one reason these books are enjoyed in these countries. Farther than these neighbouring countries, Ngugi's books, for example, *Weep Not, Child,* a story of a boy growing up during the anti-colonial resistance of the Mau Mau in the 1950s, has been taught in Ghana. It is a good story for adolescents.

As these stories are classics in Kenya, their reproduction and translation into other languages is significant. They provide a bridge between different cultures (African versus Western culture). We believe that the French translations of these books will therefore have an impact on children already familiar with the theme of war as well as on those who are not.

Many books have been written recently about ideology, but only a few have given careful thought about the relationship between ideology and translation. Ngugi's works help us to bring together *writing, translation,* and *ideology*. As Lawrence (2003) states:

> Ngugi is important because, in attending to these areas of writing, translation, language preservation and performance, his own experience, as well as his work as a scholar, make him uniquely attuned to the political consequences of translation, dominant languages, and intersecting cultures. (Lawrence in Helgeson, 2003:2)

It is by opposition to the thought that African languages are not important that Ngugi strives to show how important his mother tongue is. As Gikandi remarks

[1] The usual European way of spelling this word is incorrect, it should be Gikuyu, or in strict phonetic spelling Gekoyo. This form refers only to the country itself. A Gikuyu person is Mu-Gikuyu, plural, A-Gikuyu. But so as not to confuse our readers we have used the one form Gikuyu for all purposes. (Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya,* Heinemann, 1938: xv).

> the fact of writing in Gĩkũyũ as well as Wangũi wa Goro's ability to translate the Gĩkũyũ original into English is already an affirmation of the power of African language to exist in the same universe of language and ideology as its European counterpart. (Gikandi, 1991:166)

This research also fills in the gaps created by controversies between different theories of translation by providing comprehensive data that bring these theories together. Work already done in the field of *Descriptive Studies* (DTS) and *Cultural studies* is deepened here by demonstrating both in *theory* and *practice* through Ngugi's texts how translation operates across cultures. This research clearly promotes a critical understanding of the notion of translation situating it in multidimensional contexts.

Aspects of this project are also *useful for the teaching of translation*. There is a consistent theoretical input here that can help translation students interested in cultural studies. They can refer to this work, which is experienced-based, as their *practical guide* as it provides a means of understanding how changes occur in the process of translating across cultures. Another aspect that translation students can pick up from this work is that they can learn to assess or evaluate other peoples' translations.

Definition of concepts

The study of ideology in this work is first placed within the context of Ngugi's children's literature and then within the context of Ngugi's texts translated into French. In order to clarify certain terms, specifically ideology, culture and translation, definitions of these are discussed below.

a) Ideology

According to Gee (1996) the history of the word *ideology* has two significant moments. The first is associated with *Napoleon*, the second with *Marx*. He notes that the word *"ideology"* was first used in the late 18th century by the French philosopher de Tracy. It was used to define a *science of ideas*. In his *Eléments d' Idéologie* de Tracy proposed a new science of ideas, an *idea*-logy, which would be the foundation of all other sciences. Van Dijk (2003)

confirms this idea adding that for de Tracy ideology was the study of "how we think, speak and argue" (Van Dijk, 2003: 1-3).

Gee (1996) also notes that de Tracy rejected both '*innate ideas'*, whether from God or biology, and '*established authority'*, whether religion or state, as the source and foundation of knowledge. He rejected this viewpoint of established ideas of the church and state which claimed that people come in different 'grades' by birth (lower and higher) which fitted them to different roles in life. When Napoleon came to power he attacked the proponents of the *Enlightenment* and *democracy*. He accused them of misleading people by elevating them to a sovereignty, which they were not able to exercise. Napoleon was against this social theory of *Enlightenment* as it conflicted with his interests and powers. According to him people needed a central power to control their lives, represent their interests (of the nation) and ensure its destiny and historical mission, since they were incapable of doing this by themselves.

For Althusser, the Marxist conception of ideology is linked to the notion of *State power*. The State apparatus was essential to the *Marxist theory of State*. The conservation of *State power* by a certain class (e.g. the bourgeoisie) is what pushed the proletariat to seize *State power* in order to destroy the by then existing *Bourgeois State apparatus* and replace it with its own apparatuses. Althusser (1996; 1984) argues that in Marxist theory, the *State apparatus* (SA) contains: Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc., which he referred to as *Repressive State Apparatus* simply because they function by making use of *violence*. He also distinguishes the *State apparatuses* (SAs) from the *Ideological State Apparatuses* (ISAs). ISAs include for him churches, schools, families, political parties, media (press, radio, television), cultural activities (literature, arts, and sports) etc. The basic difference between the SAs and ISAs is that the former function by making use of violence (e.g. the police force uses physical repression) whereas the latter function ultimately by making use of ideology (e.g. no violence is involved - this is how churches, schools, and the press normally work). But it is worth noting that ISAs do sometimes use repression just as SAs sometimes use ideology for their reproduction (Althusser, 1984).

These two ideological orientations (from Napoleon and Marx) give a negative connotation to the concept of ideology. Ideologies, in this context, are abstract ideas in other peoples' heads. Contemporary definitions of ideology differ from those described above. Raymond Williams, for example, defines ideology as a "system of beliefs, and ideas characteristic of a particular class or group" (Nama, 1986: v).

This is the definition which emphasises the role of culture as central to any ideological discourse. Ngugi observes that:

> "it is the culture that a people have that embodies their values, those aesthetic and moral qualities that they consider basic and important in their contact and interaction with one another, and with the universe. A culture then embodies a community's structures of values, the basis of their world outlook, and how they see themselves and their place in the universe and in relation to other communities. It is the values that a people have that are the basis of their collective and individual image of self, their identity as a people, since culture is an ideological expression of the totality of their activities (Ngugi, 1981:9).

From the above, we see that the concept of *culture* is the concept of *difference*. Culture can be seen as "a matter of group identity as constituted by some differences among others" (Appadurai, 1995:13). This context of culture views the *material, linguistic, territorial,* and *political* attributes of culture and their naturalisation as essential to group identity.

This is developed in the ethnologist Ward Goodenough's definition:

> As I see it, a society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves. Culture, being what people have to learn as distinct from their biological heritage, must consist of the end product of learning knowledge, in a most general, if relative, sense of the term. By this definition, we should note that culture is not a material phenomenon; it does not consist of things, people, behaviour, or emotions. It is rather an organisation of these things. It is the forms of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them.
>
> (Goodenough in Nord, 1997:24)

Nord remarks further that culture can be subdivided into *paraculture* (the norms, rules, and conventions valid for an entire society), *diaculture* (norms, rules and conventions valid for a particular group within the society, such as a club, a firm or a regional entity) and *idioculture* (the culture of an individual person as opposed to other individuals) (Nord,

1997:24). Culture "is not something people have; it is something that fills the spaces between them. And culture is not an exhaustive description of anything; it focuses on differences, differences that can vary from task to task and group to group" (Agar in Nord 1997:24).

(b) Translation and Culture

Reiss and Vermeer perceive translation in a cross cultural context. They describe it as "part of the world, as an act, a process, carried out in a certain "situation." They point out that "a translator is a human being and a translation is an interpretation, a new text in a new culture" (Reiss & Vermeer in Oittinen, 2000:11).

It is obvious that if translation is bound to its situation, translators should take situation into consideration when translating from one culture to another. This situation not only involves time, place and culture but also issues such as the translator as a human being and his/her ideology.

Culture is therefore a key concept in translation studies and, as a social force, provides a fresh way of looking at translation. It also provides us with a number of ideological problems, which are *significant* for *translation studies*. Ngugi confirms this through his stories where we notice the clash not only between classes but also between cultures. The translation of such texts requires translators to pay attention to *cultural aspects* in order to make the target text comprehensible to the new reader.

In light of the above, it is clear that the symbiotic relationship between translation, literature and culture lends itself to a sociological or cultural approach. A basic assumption about the translation of a literary work is that any translation of a work of art must consider the cultural norms from which the work of art evolved. A translation which does not reflect the connection between translation techniques and social concerns is likely to remain inadequate in terms of accessibility to the target audience. This, however, does not mean that traditional approaches focusing on textual features rather than on cultural features are totally inappropriate. The source language is charged with the cultural heritage of a given linguistic group that the writer uses and transforms into artistic devices in his works. Hence any decodification of these devices in a text will be enhanced by socio-cultural information.

If the cultural information enhances our understanding of a work of art (i.e. its characters, plot, style and structure) then it is valuable both in literary criticism and translation. As Ross states:

> Prescriptive translation with its focus on textual meaning, which excludes target culture's influence, has proved to be too limiting, for there is no assurance that the translation will have the same effect on the readers of the target culture as the source text would have on the source culture. The target culture was disregarded. (Ross, 1991:9)

She continues:

> In contrast the most recent focus on the mode of translation entails the individual interpretation of culture. The source culture is no longer foisted on the target language, but interpreted in terms of adaptation into that of the target milieu. (Ross, 1991:9)

The translator as a mediator tries to negotiate meaning between the source culture and the target culture. In our context the Cameroonian and French cultures are of particular importance in the adaptation of Ngugi's texts. Culture is in translation a crossroads or a meeting place, where source and target texts are shaped, where self and others are fashioned.

In many recent publications "translation" "encompasses more than the movement of expression from one language to another, and includes the translating of one culture into the terms of another, translating the particularities of historical experience into the broader grasp of humanity, and translating specific personal experience into the broader grasp" (Overvold, et *al*., 2003:2). Such a view indicates that the changing selves and the many roles played in African (children's) literature require on-going and varied acts of translation. For several African critics and writers, prominent among whom is Ngugi, it is crucial that "African writers express themselves in a medium that does not needlessly constrain or distort the freedom of their creativity, the relation with their African audience, and the possibility of promoting the urgent social transformations" (Overvold, et *al*., 2003:113). Given the situation from which Ngugi writes, access to all the presuppositions in Ngugi's literary texts may pose problems for the translators. However, the cultural gap between the amount of information presupposed with respect to source-text receivers and

the world knowledge of the target–text addressees can "be bridged by additional information or adaptations introduced by the translator" (Nord, 1997:86).

As translation takes place in concrete definable situations that involve members of different cultures, a translator has to be aware of how people interpret the world and how s/he also interprets the text world in a translation task between groups or cultures. That is why the emphatic role of cultural values in Ngugi's works is given special prominence here because they express a Gĩkũyũ communitarian, philosophical way of life that other children (from other countries) can learn from (See Chapter I).

c) Ideology, culture and translation

Perhaps the most radical reading of the interconnection between ideology and translation in recent years has been that of André Lefevere's now classic 199*2* publication, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of literary Fame*, together with another text he wrote with Susan Bassnett in 1998, *Constructing Cultures*. The two insist that translation is inseparably bound to culture. Therefore, we need not only to understand literature and translation as practised in the West, but also to understand how they are practised in other cultures. This is because translation is not and cannot be limited to one culture. When we compare different translations, for instance, we see clearly that there is a need to select from a number of possible strategies to translate a text for another culture. The norms of the culture for which the TT is intended must be taken into account if the translation is to be deemed a success in that culture (Lefevere, et al., 1998:10-12). Translation, in this descriptive and communicative context, challenges boundaries. It challenges the opinions of prescriptivist scholars who still think that "translators should not "change" the original, for better or worse" (Oittinen, 2000:163). Such an approach makes excuses that cultures are unchanging. It is an approach that neglects the child's reading experience and culture.

The move from prescriptive to *Cultural Studies* in translation is, in our view, a rediscovery of translation that informs translation studies. We agree, therefore, with Lefevere who says that "it is time, then, that attention turns to translation as a pivotal mechanism in creating and transmitting cultural values" (1996: 135). Ngugi's texts, under analysis, are a powerful case in point.

Structure of the work

The project brings together linguistic and cultural aspects of translation in an ideological discourse framework set out in Chapter One: *Ngugi as writer.* This chapter provides a broad description of Ngugi in East African literature. Our focus is to show the impact his literature has on the masses as well as among children. His writings are a reflection of the struggles of Kenya during the colonial and postcolonial period. His literature is linked to politics because the writer believes that literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shaped and still shape our society. That is why his works reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in Kenya society. In most of his books he portrays the Mau Mau struggle of national patriotic culture against the foreign-based culture. This ideological battle is what characterises most of Ngugi's literature. This chapter also discusses how the ideologies are reflected in children's literature.

Chapter Two addresses *ideology and translation in children's fiction*. The chapter starts by establishing the link that exists between ideology, language and translation. It looks at the problems that arise in translating across cultures. This chapter gives a resounding "No" in answer to the assertion that children's literature is neutral, powerless i.e. deprived of ideological influence**.** It shows from Ngugi's texts how ideology in children's books (postcolonial literature in this context) should not be taken for granted or this literature may be 'mistranslated'.

Chapter Three deals with *Methodology*. This methodology is based on "theories that invite us to be sensitive to language and raise awareness about race, class and other social constructs. Theories that demonstrate the relationship between narratives and ideologies and help us to position" (Trites, 2000: xii). This chapter shows how *CDA and the systemic model* can help us to achieve our goals (i.e. depict ideologies in children's books).

Chapter Four is the main part of this research. It presents a comparative analysis of source and target texts, focusing on shifts, norms and strategies in the translation of Ngugi's children books from English into French. It deals with *problems* in lexicography, grammar and norms and strategies used in translation. The chapter is a practical demonstration of the theories discussed in Chapter Two. The main part of this chapter concentrates on the description of changes in the translation product due to the distance between the reality reflected in the source text and the reality in which the recipients live. These analyses also take into account the evaluation of the translators' work in order to ascertain the degree of adaptation of their texts to their respective audiences. This chapter also discusses various types of solutions such as deletion, abridgement, purification and avoidance utilised by the translator to adapt, domesticate or foreignise his text it by keeping close either to the original or the target reader. The basis of our discussion in this chapter is that the readers of the original and target texts belong to different cultures. The argument presented is that if translators need to be successful, they need "to adapt their texts according to the presumptive readers" (Oittinen, 2000:78).

Chapter Five concludes the research. It demonstrates how the translations of African literary texts require extensive rewritings to ensure that they are understood by the different audiences to whom they are addressed. The conclusion states, moreover, that *Critical Discourse Analysis*, although a socio-linguistic approach, has a role to play in the development of translation theory. Its general focus on the production and reception of a text reflects the importance of culture. An approach which helps us to rethink translation by taking ideology as the point of departure in this rethinking process. The research ends by suggesting and recommending approaches that take into consideration ideology and culture in the translation of children's literature.