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Translating Rwandan folktales into English: a culture-based analysis

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CHAPTER ONE

FOLKLORE, CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION

1.0. Introduction

There certainly exists a relationship between folklore, culture and language. This relationship is based on the fact that folklore is expressed by means of language and that both language and folklore are set in the culture of the people who speak the former and produce the latter. In addition, both reflect the culture they are set in.

Translation and culture are also so interrelated that translating without taking into account both the source culture and the target culture is impossible. In particular, translating folklore, which is believed to reflect the deepest aspects of the culture that produces it, requires a special consideration of culture. This chapter explores the relationship between these four notions and the importance of paying a particular attention to culture when one is translating folklore in general and folktales in particular since this study is particularly concerned with the translation of Rwandan folktales. Prior to discussing the relationship between these notions, let me first provide a short discussion of folklore and culture.

1.1. Folklore

1.1.1. Definition

Since its creation in 1846 by William Thoms, the definition of the term "folklore" has, as Dundes (1965: 1) puts it, been subject to a great deal of discussion. According to him, some definitions concern the definition of 'lore', that is the material of folklore and others concern the folk, that is the people who produce the lore.

For Dundes (1965: 1), the most common criterion used to define folklore is the means by which it is transmitted. Basically, most people who define folklore say that it is an oral tradition. However, even this criterion is not satisfactory for three reasons put forward by Dundes (1965: 1-2). First, in a culture without writing, almost everything is passed on orally and the question is to know whether all that is transmitted orally, for instance language, hunting techniques and so on, is part of folklore. Second, in a society with writing, some forms of folklore, like autograph-book verse, book marginalia, epitaphs, and traditional letters, are almost all passed on by writing, but still these are considered as part of folklore. Finally, the third reason is that some forms of folklore, folk dance for instance, are transmitted by means of body movements.

Other authors who attempted to define folklore came up with the following definitions, all cited in Boswell and Reaver (1962:11):

For MacEdward Leach,

> Folklore is the generic term to designate the customs, beliefs, traditions, tales, magical practices, proverbs, songs, etc.; in short the accumulated knowledge of a homogeneous unsophisticated people.

According to Richard A. Waterman,

> Folklore is that art form, comprising various types of stories, proverbs, sayings, spells, songs, incantations, and other formulas, which employs spoken language as its medium.

In Aurelio N. Espinosa's terms,

> Folklore, or popular knowledge, is the accumulated store of what mankind has experienced, learned, and practiced across the ages as popular and traditional knowledge, as distinguished from so-called scientific knowledge.

Dundes (1965: 3) also provides another definition of folklore consisting of an itemised list of the forms of folklore and I think this could help us understand what is really referred to when one talks of folklore. According to him,

> folklore includes myths, legends, folktales, jokes, proverbs, riddles, chants, charms, blessings, curses, oaths, insults, retorts, taunts, teases, toasts, tongue-twisters, and greeting and leave-taking formulas...It also includes folk costume, folk dance, folk drama, (and mime), folk art, folk belief (or superstition), folk medicine, folk instrumental music (e.g., fiddle tunes), folksongs (e.g., lullabies, ballads), folk speech (e.g., slang), folk similes (e.g., as blind as a bat), folk metaphors (e.g., to paint the town red), and names (e.g., nicknames and place names) … oral epics, autograph-book verse, epitaphs, latrinalia (writings on the walls of public bathrooms), limericks, ball-bouncing rhymes, jump-rope rhymes, finger and toe rhymes, dandling rhymes (to bounce the children on the knee), counting-out rhymes (to determine who will be « it » in games), and nursery rhymes .... games; gestures; symbols; prayers (e.g. graces); practical jokes; folk etymologies; food recipes; quilt and embroidery designs; house, barn and fence types; street vendor's cries; and even traditional conventional sounds used to summon animals to give them commands; ... mnemonic devices (e.g. the name Roy G. Biv to remember the colors of the spectrum in order), envelope sealers (e.g. SWAK– Sealed With A Kiss), and the traditional comments made after body emissions (e.g., after burps and sneezes), ... festivals and special day (or holiday) customs (e.g., Christmas, Halloween, and birthday).

As can be seen, the above definitions have many features in common. By combining them, I can define folklore as the set of customs, beliefs, traditions and all types of folk literature (myths, legends tales, poems, proverbs, sayings, spells, etc) and experiences passed on from one generation of a folk, defined by Dundes (1965: 2) as 'any group of people whatsoever who share one common factor', to another either through oral tradition or through imitation.

1.1.2. Classification of folklore

According to Dorson (1972: 2), folklore can be divided into four categories. These are termed the oral literature, the material culture, the social folk custom and the performing folk arts. Each of these is, in turn, divided into different subdivisions.

The first category, the oral literature, is composed of folk narrative, folk song or folk poetry, with their subclasses. Folk narrative consists, for instance, of myths, legends, folk tales, proverbs, and riddles and so on, most of which are genres that are, as according to Dorson (1972:2), passed down from generation to generation orally and without known authorship. Folk poetry consists of different kinds of poems including narrative folk poetry, folk epics and so forth. The second category, namely the material culture, 'responds to techniques, skills, recipes, and formulas transmitted across the generations and subject to the same forces of conservative tradition and individual variation as verbal art' (Dorson, 1972:2). This is concerned, for instance, with how societies build their homes, make their clothes, prepare their food, farm and fish and do all their other everyday activities. It is concerned in brief with the society's craft arts. With regard to the third category, that is the social folk custom, it relates to community and family observances in connection with villages, households, churches, holidays, rites of passage such as those performed at different occasions like birth, initiation, marriage, death and so on. It includes the customs and beliefs of a given folk. And finally, the fourth category, that of performing folk arts, includes genres like folk music, folk dance and drama.

1.1.3. Functions of folklore

Dundes (1965: 279-298) discusses four main functions of folklore. The first function of folklore is that it serves as a form of amusement or entertainment. The second consists in the role it plays in validating culture. The third function of folklore is found in the role that it plays in education and the fourth function consists in maintaining the stability of a

culture. As Dundes (1965: 279) says, different genres of folklore can fulfil similar functions despite their forms being different. However, he also says that the functions of different genres are to some extent distinctive (Dundes, 1965: 296).

The first function of folklore, that is of amusing both people who tell it and those who listen to it, is very important. Most folklore is told at leisure time, after a hard working day, in order to amuse both the teller and the listeners and, as Thompson (1951: 3) says, to relieve the overpowering monotony of one's life. This is the case, for instance, with folktales in the Rwandan context. These are told only in the evening and it is a nationwide belief that whoever tells a folktale during the daytime runs the risk of becoming a lizard (which is believed, in Rwandan culture, to be lazy because it likes sunbathing). So people are supposed to work during the day and listen and /or tell folktales at leisure time.

As to the second function which consists in validating culture, it is, according to Dundes (1965: 292) fulfilled by 'justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them;' Malinowski (in Dundes, 1965: 292) illustrates this function by saying that myths, for instance, serve as a 'warrant, a charter, and often even a practical guide' to magic, ceremony, ritual and social structure. This is, however, not only applicable to myths. It also applies to many other genres of folklore.

As far as the third function is concerned, it is also important in the sense that most folklore is intended for younger generations in order to teach them manners, customs, beliefs, practices, and so forth. As an example, Dundes (1965: 293) says that ogre tales serve the purpose of disciplining young children, and lullabies are sung in order to put them in good humour. Fables and folktales are used to teach general attitudes and principles and to ridicule vices and misbehaviour; proverbs are used as a means to warn them against what is bad and, as Dundes (1965:296) puts it, 'to warn the dissatisfied or over-ambitious individual to be content with his lot, to accept the world as it is and thus to conform to the accepted patterns.'

Finally, folklore fulfils the function of maintaining the stability of culture in the sense that it operates within a given society to ensure conformity to the accepted cultural norms and continuity from older generations to younger ones through the role it plays in education. The genres of folklore that fulfil this function do so by applying pressure and exercising control over the members of a society with a view to maintaining its culture and

disapproving of individuals who attempt to deviate from social conventions. Folklore also fulfils this function by expressing social approval of individuals who conform to social conventions.

1.2. Culture

1.2.1. Definition

As Katan (1999: 16) puts it, all people instinctively know what culture is and the culture they belong to, but it does not follow that they can define it with ease. However, it seems that, according to the same author (1999: 16), defining culture is imperative, particularly for anthropologists, because it delimits how it is perceived and taught. Still, although many anthropologists have attempted to define culture, they have not reached any agreement regarding its nature. Following this lack of agreement as to the nature of culture, different anthropologists have come up with different definitions.

Edward Burnett Tylor (in Katan, 1999: 16) defines culture in the following terms:

> Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

For the American anthropologists Alfred Louis Kroeber and Clyde Kluckholm (in Katan, 1999: 16), culture can be defined as follows:

> culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values. Culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand, as conditioning elements of future action.

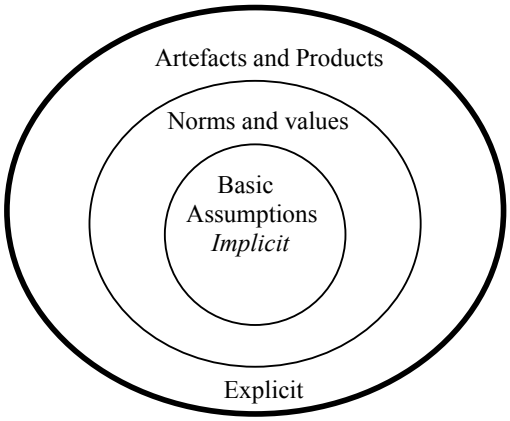
In her definition of the term ‘culture’, Gail Robinson (in Katan, 1999: 17) argues that culture can be defined as a system consisting of two levels. The first is the external level which consists of behaviours (language, gestures, customs and habits) and products (literature, folklore, art, music, artefacts). The second is the internal level which is related to ideas (beliefs, values and institutions).

Other definitions of culture can be drawn from the models of culture known as Trompenaars’ layers, Hofstede’s onion, the Iceberg theory and Hall’s Triad of culture.

Even if these models consider culture from different points of view, they have much in common and constitute a fund of information for the understanding and the definition of culture.

- Trompenaars' layers

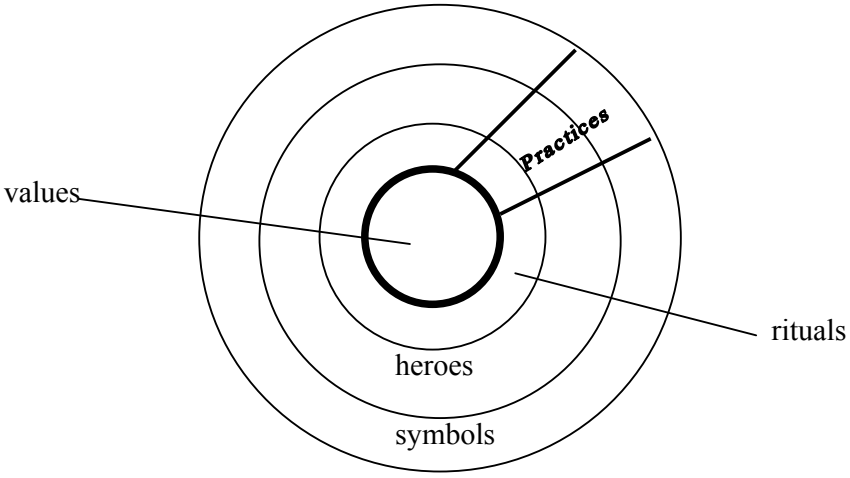
Fons Trompenaars (cited in Katan: 26) developed a model of culture, known as Trompenaars' layers, in which he argues that culture consists of three layers: the outer layer, the middle layer and the core. According to him, the outer layer is made up of artefacts and products. This includes, for instance, the organisation of institutions such as the legal system and the bureaucracy. The middle layer comprises norms and values. Norms refer to social rules of conduct while values relate to aspirations. The third layer, the core, is considered as the heart of culture and contains a given society's basic assumptions about life. Diagrammatically, this model is presented as follows:



Trompenaars' layers (Source: Katan, 1999: 26)

- Hofstede's Onion

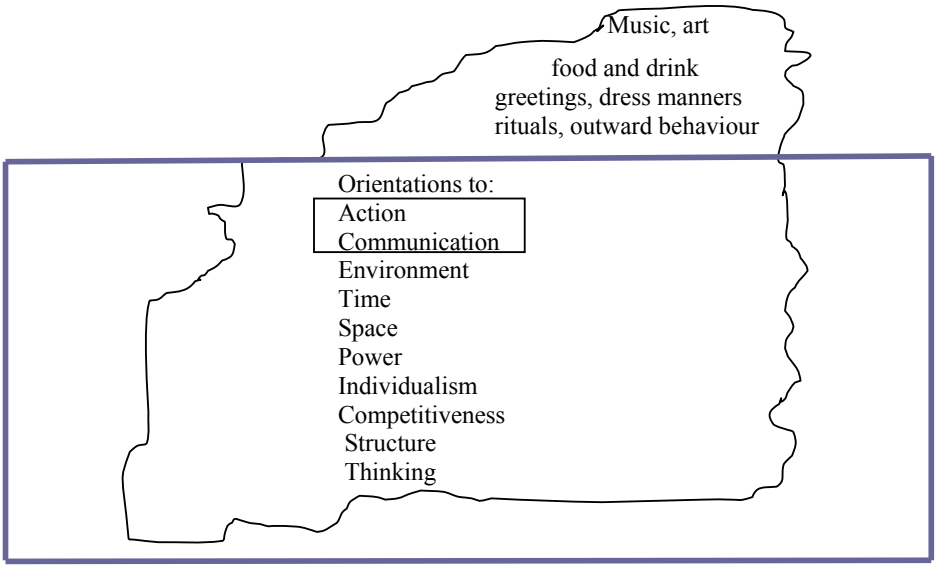
Hofstede's model of culture, advocated by Geert Hofstede, is similar to Trompenaars', except that it consists of two layers that he terms values and practices. According to him, the practice layer comprises symbols, heroes and rituals and value layer is the core of culture. This view of culture is schematically presented as follows:



Hofstede's onion (Source: Katan, 1999: 27)

- The Iceberg Theory

As to the Iceberg theory, popularised through Hall's works in the 1950s, it is based on the idea that culture consists of two parts. One part which is the most important of culture is completely hidden and the other, the least important, is visible. The first part, according to the proponents of the iceberg theory is concerned with cultural value orientations to action, communication, environment, time, space, power, individualism, competitiveness, structure and thinking. The second part, which constitutes the tip of the iceberg, consists of music, food and drink, greetings, dress manners, rituals and outward behaviour. Brake et al. cited in Katan (1999: 29) add to the list laws, customs, gestures and methods of saying goodbye. Diagrammatically, this theory looks roughly as follows:



The Iceberg (Source: Katan, 1999: 30)

- Hall's Triad of Culture

Hall's Triad of culture views culture as consisting of three levels that are termed technical culture, formal culture and informal culture. This was developed as an extension of the Iceberg Theory (Katan, 1999: 30). Technical culture is, according to Katan (1999: 30), concerned 'with communication at the level of science, that which can be measured accurately, and has no meaning outside itself.' Formal culture is, according to the same author (1999: 31), 'the culture of traditions, rules, customs, procedures and so on'. It is the culture that is part of accepted way of doing things. The informal culture is the kind of culture that is not taught or learned, but acquired informally and without being aware that one is acquiring it (Katan, 1999: 32).

As can be seen from this discussion above, culture is a very broad field that even defining it becomes very difficult. However, Nida (2001: 13) provides us with a very simple, short and practical definition of culture as 'the totality of the beliefs and practices of a society.'

1.2.2. Approaches to the study of culture

The complexity of culture has driven different anthropologists to use different approaches to the study of culture. These are, according to Katan (1999: 18-20), the behaviourist approach, the functionalist approach, the cognitive approach and the dynamic approach. These are not, however, mutually exclusive and none of them can claim to cover all aspects of culture.

❖ The behaviourist approach

The behaviourist approach to the study of culture is the approach which consists in finding out facts about what given folk or people do and do not do. People of different cultures conceive of the world they live in differently, which makes them observe different do's and don't's. It is forbidden for the British, for instance, to kill sparrows. But for Rwandans, it is forbidden to kill wagtails. The behaviourist approach is the approach to the study of culture based on such facts about what is allowed and what is forbidden in a given culture or society.

This approach tends towards ethnocentrism, which is, according to Bennett (in Katan 1999: 18), 'the belief that the worldview of one's culture is central to all reality.' Ethnocentrism

has, however, one shortcoming: it makes people believe that their own culture is superior to other cultures. As an approach to the teaching of culture, ethnocentrism does not help students to reason because it makes them believe that only their own culture is natural and right. It prevents them then from understanding other cultures and considering their different aspects.

- ❖ Functionalist approach

The functionalist approach is the approach which goes beyond the behaviourist approach and attempts to find the reason why people observes such do's and don't's. According to Katan (1999: 19), the functionalist approach is an approach that looks behind the behaviour for reason.

- ❖ The cognitive approach

The cognitive approach to the study of culture consists in attempting to explain internal and mental reasons for the links between a particular cause and a particular effect. This approach 'tends to use the concepts of modelling, and talks of mapping, underlying patterns and the culture-bound categorizing of experience' (Katan, 1999: 19). In connection with this, Nostrand (in Katan, 1999: 19) 'talks of a culture's 'central code' which involves the culture's 'ground of meaning'; its systems of major values, habitual patterns of thought, and certain prevalent assumptions about human nature an society which the foreigner should be prepared to encounter'.

- ❖ The dynamic approach

The dynamic approach to the study of culture views culture 'as a dynamic process, constantly being negotiated by those involved. It is influenced, but not determined, by past meanings and it establishes precedent for future meanings' (Katan, 1999: 21).

1.3. Folklore, language, culture and translation

These four elements are closely related to one another. Firstly, folklore is related to culture in the sense that it is, as previously mentioned, a mirror of culture. Folklore reflects culture because it relates to the way of life of the people who produce it: their ceremonies, their institutions, their crafts and so on. It also expresses their beliefs, customs, attitudes and their way of thinking. Folklore actually gives a penetrating picture of the way of life of the

people who produce it (Dundes, 1965: 284). For that reason, it is, as pointed out by Malinowski (in Dundes 1965: 281), important to understand the setting of folklore in its actual life if one wants to understand it. According to Malinowski (in Dundes, 1965: 282), 'text … is extremely important, but without the context it remains lifeless.' This means that one cannot fully understand folklore without understanding its cultural context.

The relationship between culture and folklore can also be shown in the definition of folktales, as part of folklore, by Lester (1969: vii) who says that

> Folktales are stories that give people a way of communicating with each other about each other- their fears, their hopes, their dreams, their fantasies, giving their explanations of why the world is the way it is. It is in stories like these that a child learns who his parents are and who he will become.

Arbuthnot (1964: 255) corroborates this idea by saying that '...folktales have been the cement of society. They not only expressed but codified and reinforced the way people thought, felt, believed and behaved.'

Secondly, language and culture are also related in two respects: language is, like folklore, a mirror of culture and it is an integral part of culture as well. Language is a mirror of culture in the sense that, as Snell-Hornby (1988: 40) puts it, 'language is an expression of both culture and the individuality of the speaker, who perceives the world through language'. Actually, language reflects the culture of the folk that speak it and through language, one can learn much about the culture in which a language is set or used.

In addition, language is not, as pointed out by Snell-Hornby (1988:39), 'an isolated phenomenon suspended in a vacuum but an integral part of culture.' As such, language is better understood with reference to culture. According to Malinowski (1923/1938: 306), 'the study of language, spoken by a people … must be carried out in conjunction with their culture and their environment'. Culture should, thus, be understood as the framework within which all communication takes place (Katan, 1999: 241). The meaning transferred through language is, then, dependent upon culture because the words of a language are culture-bound and the form of language, according to Boas (in Katan, 1999: 73) is moulded by the state of culture. Sapir, also convinced of the close relationship between language and culture, says that 'language has a setting … language does not exist apart from culture' (Katan, 1999: 73). In other words, language ties up with cultural and social realities. Language finds its meaning in its own context.

For Nida (2001: 13), language also constitutes the most distinctive feature of a culture. People can be identified as belonging to such and such a culture on the basis of the language that they speak. Language, according to Nida (2001: 27), represents the culture because the words refer to the culture, as the beliefs and practices of a culture.

The other relationship between language and culture can be discussed in terms of how culture makes use of language. Language is used to provide information about processes and the values of a culture, to direct the activity of a culture, to establish and maintain a positive emotional state for the participants within a culture, to perform rituals in a culture, to establish and maintain interpersonal relations, to carry out the cognitive activity (that is thinking), to perform cultural recreative activities and to express the aesthetics of a culture (Nida, 2001: 25). Language is therefore, as Nida (2001: 13) says, indispensable for the functioning and perpetuation of the culture.

Thirdly, culture and translation are linked because, as previously mentioned, translating involves the consideration of the source and target language cultures. Translation is now viewed as a cultural rather than linguistic transfer and not as a process of transcoding but as an act of communication (Snell-Hornby, 43-44). Vermeer, one of the leading proponents of this trend, sees translation as a 'crosscultural transfer' and holds the view that the translator should be not only bilingual or multilingual but also bicultural, if not multicultural (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990: 82). Translation is now defined as a means of intercultural communication, a means to make up for cultural differences.

According to Snell-Hornby (1988: 42), the concept of culture as a totality of knowledge, proficiency and perceptions is fundamental in Translation Studies. Using language which is, as mentioned previously, an integral part of culture, the translator needs not only proficiency in the languages he is working with, but also in the cultures that host those languages. She also says that the extent to which the translator understands the cultures determines his or her ability not only to understand the source text but also to produce the target text that fits in the target language culture.

The concept of culture is then of paramount importance in Translation Studies. This is because translation involves at least two languages and hence two cultures. However, as Jakobson (in Snell-Hornby et al, 1995: 327) says, cultures not only express ideas differently, they also shape concepts and texts differently.

Considered as an intercultural act of communication, translation should thus take into account cultures it is concerned with since it can, as de Beaugrande et al. (1992: 37) say, be properly understood only within a socio-cultural frame of reference which may well differ among languages, text-types or cultures.

In addition, translators should be aware of cultural differences because, according to Snell-Hornby (1988: 41), 'the extent to which a text is translatable varies with the degree to which it is embedded in its own specific culture, also with the distance that separates the cultural background of source text and target audience in terms of place and time.' The concept of culture, therefore, deserves to be considered in translation studies owing to the influence that culture exerts on the text that is embedded in it. Moreover, any translation produced should fit into the target culture of the target language.

1.4. Folktales

Now that I have discussed folklore in general and its relationship with language, culture and the relationship between culture and translation, it is now time to discuss in detail the genre with which this study is primarily concerned in general and this genre in the Rwandan context in particular.

In his attempt at defining folktales as a genre, Dorson (1972: 60) says that

> the folktale embodies the highly polished, artistic story genres that have a relatively consistent, finished form. Their origin, goals and themes, on the other hand, are diverse. Like novels and short stories, their sophisticated counterparts, folktales are told primarily for entertainment, although they may have secondary purposes. They are believed to be fictitious, and are cited as lies by storytellers and commentators, who mean that tales are the creation of human phantasy (archaic spelling).

Folktales, are according to Bascom (in Norton, 1987: 203), 'prose narrative which are regarded as fiction. They are not considered as dogma or history, they may have or may not have happened, and they are not taken seriously.' Norton (1987: 203) adds that folktales seem to be timeless and placeless because they are set in any time and place. For Thompson (1951: 4), 'folklates include all forms of prose narrative, written or oral, which have come to be handed down through the years.'

1.4.1. Types of folktales

Folktales can be put into categories according to different criteria. These include, as put forward by Thompson (1951: 7), origin, form or content. Thompson (1951: 7-9) distinguishes six types of folktales. These are termed *Märchen* (fairy-tales), the novella, hero tales, local tradition or local legend or migratory legend, explanatory tales and animal tales.

A *Märchen* is a tale of some length involving a succession of motifs or episodes. It is a kind of tale which moves in an unreal world without definite locality or definite characters and is filled with the marvellous. In this kind of tale, which deals with chimerical world, heroes kill adversaries, succeed to kingdoms and marry princesses. Some of these kinds of tale include fairies. The novella is similar to a *Märchen* in general structure but the action in the novella occurs in a real world with definite time and space. As for hero tales, they are characterised by superhuman characters. This kind of folktale is more inclusive than either of the two kinds mentioned above. A hero tale may move in the fantastic world of the *Märchen* or the pseudo-realistic world of the novella. Concerning the local tradition, it is an account of an extraordinary happening believed to have actually occurred or may tell of an encounter with marvellous creatures which the folk still believe in – fairies, ghosts, the devil and so on. As far as explanatory tales are concerned, they are stories that account for the explanation of the existence of some hill or cliff or the origins and characteristics of various animals, plants, mankind and so forth. This kind of tale is also termed 'etiological tale', 'natursage or pourquoi story. And finally, animal tales are stories with animal characters which are, designed to show the cleverness of one animal and the stupidity of another (Thompson, 1951: 8-9).

Norton (1987: 203-204) also distinguishes six subcategories of folktales. He terms them cumulative tales, humorous tales, beast tales, magic and wonder tales, *pourquoi* tales and realistic tales. Some of these categories overlap with Thompson's categories. Cumulative tales are tales that repeat the action, characters or speeches in the story until a climax is reached. Humorous tales are tales which allow people to laugh at themselves as well as others. As for beast tales, they are tales in which beasts talk and act quite like people. Magic and wonder tales are those which contain some element of magic. Pourquoi tales are concerned with tales which explain how animals, plants, or human beings were created and why they have certain characteristics. Finally, realistic tales are stories that have – unlike

the majority of folktales which include supernatural characters, magic, or other exaggerated incidents– realistic plots involving people who could have existed.

1.4.2. Characteristics of folktales

According to Norton (1987: 203), folktales usually tell the adventures of animal or human characters. They contain common narrative motifs – such as supernatural adversaries (ogres, witches, and giants), supernatural helpers, magic and marvels, tasks and quests – and common themes – such as reward of good and punishment of evil. These seem to be the universal characteristics of folktales.

I would like to propose two angles from which one can look at the characteristics of folktales. One angle is what I can call the extratextual angle and the second is the intratextual angle. The extratextual angle is concerned with elements that are beyond or not part of the folktale as a text while the intratextual angle is concerned with elements that are found in the folktale as text.

- **Extratextual characteristics of folktale**

According to Thompson (1951: 13), the telling of folktales is a constant activity all over the world. However, the activity is by no means uniform in the various parts of the world, and as one moves over the continents, one finds extraordinary variability within the uniformity of the general practice. A careful study of the practice of telling folktales also reveals that they are not mere creatures of chance. They exist in time and space, and they are affected by the nature of the land where they are current, by the linguistic and social contacts of its people, and by the lapse of the years and their accompanying historic changes. In addition, all people have produced stories and there are striking similarities among the tales of different peoples even if folktales vary from people to people or from culture to culture (Arbuthnot, 1964: 254).

As a folk narrative, the folktale is, according to Orlik (in Thompson, 1951: 456), characterised by the following principles:

1. A tale does not begin with the most important part of the action and it does not end abruptly. There is a leisurely introduction; and the story proceeds beyond the climax to a point of rest or stability.
2. Repetition is everywhere present, not only to give a story a suspense but also to fill it out and afford it a body. This repetition

is mostly threefold, though in some countries, because of their religious symbolism, it may be fourfold.
3. Generally there are but two persons in a scene at one time. Even if there are more, only two of them are active simultaneously.
4. Contrasting characters encounter each other –hero and villain, good and bad.
5. If two persons appear in the same role, they are represented as small or weak. They are usually twins and when they become powerful they may be protagonists.
6. The weakest or the worst in a group turns out to be the best. The younger brother or sister is normally the victor.
7. The characterisation is simple. Only such qualities as directly affect the story are mentioned: no hint is given that the persons in the tale have any life outside.
8. The plot is simple, never complex. One story is told at a time. The carrying along of two or more subplots is a sure sign of sophisticated literature.
9. Everything is handled as simply as possible. Things of the same kind are described as nearly alike as possible, and no attempt is made to secure variety.

These principles that I consider as characteristics of oral folk narrative which folktales are part of are, according to Thompson (1951: 457), valid for the most highly developed, as well as for the narrative art peculiar to the oral tale.

- **Intratextual characteristics of folktales**

From an intratextual point of view, the characteristics of folktales can be looked at in terms of their setting, characterisation and plot development, style and theme.

The setting of a folktale includes, like setting in literature, both time and place. As far as time in folktale is concerned, it is always the far distant past, usually introduced by some version of ‘once upon a time’ or ‘long ago’. The very first line of a folktale places the listener immediately in the past (Norton (1987: 209). As to geographical location, folktales are not set everywhere. Their settings may vary from folktale to folktale, depending on the content. A folktale containing magical spells may be, for instance, set in a certain kingdom, deep in the forest, in the humble hut of a wise and good peasant, in splendid castles or in a distant land (Norton, 1987: 92). Generally speaking, one can say that folktales are normally set in a place far from where they are told.

Concerning characterisation, folktales comprise characters that are less completely developed than are characters in other types of stories. Folktale characters are essentially

symbolic and flat; they have, in other words, a limited range of personal characteristics and do not change in the course of the story (Norton, 1987: 209). Another important element about characterisation is that folktales establish the main characters' natures at the very beginning.

Folktales are also characterised by a kind of plot development that is based on conflict and action. According to Norton (1987: 209), the nature of the oral tradition made it imperative that listeners be brought quickly into the action and identify themselves with the characters. He goes on to say that folktales immerse the listeners or readers (if written) into the major conflict at their very beginning.

As to the characteristic themes of folktales, Norton (1987: 211) says that folktales contain universal truths and reflect the traditional values of the times and societies in which they originated. The characters, their actions and their rewards and punishments develop themes related to the highest human hopes about moral and material achievements: good overcomes evil; justice triumphs; unselfish love conquers; intelligence wins out over physical strength; kindness, diligence, and hard work bring rewards. The tales also show what happens to those who do not meet the traditional standards: the jealous queen is punished, the wicked stepsisters are punished in one way or another, the foolish king loses part of his fortune or his daughter, the greedy man loses the source of his success or his well being, the child who does not listen to advice is punished in a way or another and the like. For Norton (1987: 211), the universality of these themes suggests that peoples everywhere have responded to similar ideals and beliefs.

As far as motifs are concerned, folktales from all over the world centre on the same motifs. The most common motifs include, according to Norton (1983/1987: 211), supernatural beings, extraordinary animals, magical objects, powers and transformations.

Supernatural beings in folktales are either adversaries or helpers. Extraordinary animals are also popular characters in the folktales all over the world. Many folktales are based on magical objects or powers and on characters that transform themselves or turn their adversaries into different creatures.

1.4.3. Functions of folktales

Being part of folklore, folktales fulfil the four functions mentioned in section 1.1.3. However, folktales are, according to Dorson (1972: 60), primarily intended to fulfil the function of entertainment. In addition, as folktales are intended for young people, they are also to serve an educational purpose.

According to Thompson (1951: 449), the traditional tale is one of the principal forms of entertainment. This is even more important in societies out of the reach of modern communication tools and where not all people know how to read and write.

Moreover, folktales serve the purpose of educating young people as to a people's culture (beliefs, customs, traditions, ways of doing things, what is considered good or bad etc.). Folktales convey values to be passed on from one generation to another.

As can be seen from the discussion carried out in this chapter, the translation of Rwandan folktales requires a deep analysis of the culture it is set in. This is of considerable importance because folktales, as part of folklore, are an integral part of culture, which influences them to a large extent according to the way the people who produce them conceive of the world. This means that folklore is relative to the way the people who produce it see the world. They actually reflect the culture they are set in so that culture-bound elements abound in folktales to the extent that one cannot translate without paying particular attention to culture-related elements.

1.4.4. Rwandan folktales: Structure, characterisation and setting

Like all other societies in the world, the Rwandan society has folklore of its own which encompasses all existing genres of folklore. As Smith (1975: 20) says, 'le vaste domaine de récits populaires rwandais est constitué par un ensemble structuré de genres mutuellement exclusifs et qui se répartissent sur la totalité de la matière' (the broad area of Rwandan folk stories is made up of a well-structured body of mutually exclusive genres which cover all genres of folklore as a whole)[1]. I do not intend to explore the Rwandan folklore in its entirety, but instead, I would like to focus on the genre with which this study is concerned, namely the folktale.

[1] All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

Smith (1975) talks about three types of folktales that exist in Rwandan folklore. He terms them *'contes merveilleux'* (magic and wonder folktales), *'contes satiriques'* (humorous tales aimed at criticising society) and *'contes du lièvre'* (hare tales). However, other types of tales also exist and, in general, Rwandan folktales have the same characteristics as other tales from all over the world. Personally, I find his term '*contes du lièvre'* restrictive for, even if hare is the main character in Rwandan folktales, other animals also play such important roles that what he calls *'contes du lièvre'* should be termed 'animal tales.' For the purpose of this study, I will not go into detail as far as the types of Rwandan folktales are concerned for I do not judge it necessary. Let me rather explore the structure, characterisation and settings of Rwandan folktales since these are the elements that are so relevant to the present study and see how these aspects make Rwandan folktales typical of Rwandan story-telling and how they show that Rwandan folktales are embedded in a culture of their own.

Throughout the world, folktales, like other stories, are made up of three parts: introduction, development and conclusion. However, all three parts have features which are typical of folktales and make them a genre of their own. The introduction comprises the opening formulae and, as Arbuthnot (1964: 276) says, it introduces the leading characters, the time and place of the story and the theme (the idea of the story, the centre of interest – what the story is about). The introduction actually establishes the predominant mood of the story (Arbuthnot, 1964: 279). In Propp's (1968: 25) terms, this is the introduction of the initial situation. The development or the body of the story carries on, as Arbuthnot (1964: 277) says, the note of the trouble sounded in the introduction. The quest begins, the tasks are initiated and performed, the flight gets under way etc. This is the heart of the story – action that mounts steadily until it reaches a climax, when the problem or conflict will be resolved in one way or another. The development of the story is really the plot – what happens to the theme. And finally comes the conclusion of the folktale which, according to Arbuthnot (1964: 277), comes swiftly and follows on the heels of the climax and ends everything that was started in the introduction. The conclusion sends the listener back to the real world. It also comprises the closing formulae.

Even if the development of the folktale follows the line of story mentioned above, folktales are not introduced and concluded in the same way all over the world. The opening and

closing formulae differ from culture to culture. However, it is a general rule all over the world that folktales do not begin with a sudden action and do not end abruptly.

Dorson (1972: 60-61), talking about the roles of introductions and conclusions of folktales, says that

> the framework of the tale comprises the introduction and the conclusion as well as the formulaic interjections used by the narrator. These elements are directly related to the telling situation. They prepare the atmosphere for the acceptance and enjoyment of the tale action, and by providing a happy ending guide the audience back to everyday reality.

Norton (1987: 208) also says that the introductions inform the listener that enchantment and overcoming obstacles are both possible in the tales about to unfold.

Introductions and conclusions of folktales have fixed opening and closing formulae typical of each culture. For instance, a Russian tale begins 'Long ago, in a distant kingdom, in a distant land, lived Tsar Vyslar Andronovich'; native American tales may begin with some version of 'when all was new, and the gods dwelt in the ancient places, long, long before the time of our ancients'; a French tale opens with 'on a day of days in the time of our fathers' and a German tale begins with 'in the olden days when wishing still helped one' (Norton, 1987: 208).

Rwandan folktales also have particular opening and closing formulae. The most common opening formula is "Kera habayeho (Literally 'Long ago, there lived.'). However, this is often preceded by one of many other formulae. These include, according to Bigirumwami (1971: c-e), long formulae like:

> 1. Mbacire umugani mbabambuze umugani, n'uzava i kantarange azasange ubukombe bw'umugani buziritse ku muganda w'inzu. Ubusa bwalitse ku manga, umuyaga urabwarurira, agaca karacuranga, uruvu ruravugiriza, umusambi usabagirira inanga/ Nyiramusambi isabagirira inanga. Akabuye kibiritse kajya epfo nibirika njya ruguru; imbwa iti 'mbwee!' Nti 'gapfe'; inka iti 'mbaa!' Nti 'kura dukurane mwana w'Imana.' Harabaye ntihakabe,
> - [2]hapfuye imbwa n' imbeba.
> - hapfuye imbaragasa n'imbeba, imbwa zihiga ibyahi by'umwami.

[2] The sign – indicates possible alternatives.

- havutse inka n'ingabo, hasigaye (or- harokotse) inka n'ingoma.
Umugani wa .... - Kera habayeho[3] ....
(Let me tell you a tale and wake you up by means of a tale so that whoever comes from far away may find a well established tale tied to the pillar of the wall of the hut. Nothingness nested at a steep slope and the wind destroyed its nest, the sparrowhawk played the zither, the chameleon whistled and the crane danced to the rhythm of the zither. A small stone sank downwards and I sank upwards. The dog went 'bow-bow' and I said 'may you die'; the cow went 'moo' and I said 'may you grow up with me, my dear'. Misfortune happened once and may it not happen agai,
- only dogs and mice have died.
- only fleas and mice have died, and dogs hunted the king's bedding.
- only cows and soldiers were born; only cows and royal drum survived.
The tale of … (+ title of the tale…). Once upon a time…).

2. Mbacire umugani mbabambuze umugani, n'uzaturuka - n'uzava i Kantarange - i Gacamugani azasange ari ubukombe bw'umugani buziritse – bushimitse ku muganda w'inzu ivure. Harabaye ntihakabe,
- hapfuye imbwa n' imbeba.
- hapfuye imbaragasa n'imbeba, imbwa zihiga ibyahi by'umwami.
- havutse inka n'ingabo, hasigaye - harokotse inka n'ingoma.
Umugani wa …..- Kera habayeho…

(Let me tell a tale and wake you up by means of tale so that whoever comes far away – from the kingdom of tale-telling may find a well established tale tied to the pillar of the wall of the hut. Misfortune happened once and may it not happen again,
- only dogs and mice have died.
- Only fleas and mice have died, and dogs hunted the king's bedding.

[3] Although the expression is not in the original, it is usually commonly used to introduce the initial situation.

- Only cows and soldiers were born; only cows and the royal drum survived.

The tale of … (+ title of the tale). Once upon a time …).

Before 'Harabaye ntihakabe' in 1 and 2, other formulae can be inserted. These are:

- Bati 'mbe mununi ko ufite umunwa muremure usongoye'; iti 'inzoga y'ibwami isongogererwa kure';
- Bati 'mbe mununi ko ufite umunwa muremure'; uti isuka irokoye ni yo ihinga igishanga';
- Icyibo cy'umugore ntikikaramutse icy'umugabo ngo 'Hobe Rwamasunzu', ni ko gasuzuguro mu Rwanda – ni yo masuzugurane mu rugo.

(For further alternatives, see Bigirumwami, 1971).

(- A sunbird was told, 'You have got a very long bill'; it replied, 'The beer from the palace is tasted from far away.'

- A sunbird was told, 'You have got a very long bill'; it replied 'It is a very sharp hoe which tills the swamp best.'
- A woman's basket should never greet a man's saying 'Hug me Rwamasunzu' for that's the origin of disrespect in Rwanda – that's the origin of mutual disrespect in a household).

As for the closing formulae, all Rwandan folktales usually end with "Si jye wahera hahera umugani" (Literally 'It is not me who ends but the tale' or 'That is the end of the tale, not mine') [Translation is mine]. Alternatives to this are 'Si jye wahera hahera impyisi –intare – umugome – umubisha'[4] and so on. These formulae can be followed by one of the following, as recorded by Bigirumwami (1971: e):

- 'Rutegaminsi rwa Tegera, uko umugabo ateze si ko ategurirwa!' (Rutegaminsi of Tegera, a man's place is not decorated following the way he appears.).

- 'Nshiye mu rutoki rwa marume, nducamo ibitoke umunani, mbitara mu rwina, mbyengesha urwiri, nti uwo si umugani ni ubukombe bwabo.' (I've just passed through my maternal uncle's banana

[4] The choice of the words depends on each tale. Normally, the animal which or person who was punished or suffered misfortune because of its/his stupidity or wrong doing is the one to be named after 'si jye wahera hahera …'

plantation, picked up eight complete bunches of banana, put them into the banana ditch for them to ripen, squeezed the juice out of them using weeds and said, 'that is not an ordinary tale but a well established one'.).

- 'Nshiye mu rutoke rwa marume ruhinduka amatembetembe.'
  (I've just passed through my maternal uncle's banana plantation and the banana plants changed into banana-like plants).

- 'Nyuze mu masaka ya marume ahinduka urubingo'.
  (I've passed through my maternal uncle's sorghum plantation and it changed into bulrush).

- 'Nyuze mu buro bwa marume buhinduka urumamfu.'
  (I've just passed through my maternal uncle's wheat plantation and the wheat got rusted).

- 'Nyuze mu mateke ya marume ahinduka ibitika.'
  (I've just passed through my maternal uncle's taro plantation and its taro trees changed into taro-like trees).

- 'Nyuze mu bijumba bya marume bihinduka ibijumbajumba.'
  (I've just passed through my maternal uncle's sweet potato plantation and the potato trees change into potato-like trees).

- 'Ntereye akabuye ku kabira ka Bugondo – ka Kabarondo, kibira kajya epfo – kibira kajya amajyepfo; niburuka njya ruguru –niburuka amajyaruguru; gahuye n'ihene iti 'meee!' nti 'iragahena amaraso', nti 'byira mbyiruke, byira wa kabyira we! Gahuye n'intama iti 'mhaaa!' nti 'kura dukurane mwana w'Imana –kura dukurane mana y'i Rwanda – kura dukurane Mana y'inka n'ingoma mu Rwanda!'
  (I've just thrown a small stone into the river of Bugondo – of Kabarondo, it sank downwards and I emerged upwards; it met a goat which bleated and I said 'may your blood stop circulating, grow slowly and let me grow quickly. It met a sheep and it bleated and I said 'May you grow up at the same time as I grow, my dear' – 'May you

grow up god of Rwanda' – 'May you grow up creator of cattle and the royal drum of Rwanda).

As can be seen from the above, Rwandan opening and closing formulae are rather lengthy. They can also be said to be linguistically sophisticated in the sense that they prepare the atmosphere for the acceptance and enjoyment of the tale action using expressions of which the meaning is not directly decipherable at the very beginning and informing the listener about the enchantment and obstacles present in the tale by means of almost impossible actions performed by characters – most of which are small animals and insects – that are not normally expected to perform actions they do in the tale. In addition, some of them are even intended to make people laugh because they are funny and seem impossible and put them in a mood that makes them pay attention to the story.

As an example, consider the expression used in the opening formula namely *'Ubusa bwaritse ku manga, umuyaga urabwarurira, agaca karacuranga, uruvu ruravugiliza, nyiramusambi isabagirira inanga'* (Nothingness nested at a steep slope and the wind destroyed its nest, a sparrowhawk played the zither, the chameleon whistled and the crane danced to the rhythm of the zither). This certainly shows how the tale will be full of action events and interesting themes worth listening to. Still, the expression also reveals that there may be some unusual things in the tale since the animals mentioned are not normally the performers of the actions they perform in the expression.

From a personal point of view, this could also be a way of preparing the listeners' minds to the fact that all that the tale says is not true, but rather an imaginary story, which may not be true.

As far as characterisation, Rwandan folktales have, like folktales from all over the world, human, animal, supernatural and inanimate characters. In particular, animal characters play important roles in Rwandan folktales as they do in folktales in other cultures. This is because, as put by Thompson (1951: 217), the world of the human and of the animal are never far apart as far as tale telling is concerned. Many folktales told from all over the world are, as Werner (1995: 25) suggests, concerned with animals speaking and acting as if they were human beings.

Characters (whether humans, animals or objects) vary of course from culture to culture. Some are pictured as true, bearing names that exist in a culture, but others are just

imaginary characters. What is typical of humans in folktales as far as culture is concerned is that they are named according to the culture the folktale is set in. Characters in English folktales have, at least most of them, English names and those in Rwandan folktales have Rwandan names. These names could of course be invented, of course, in such a way that their meaning relates to the features of the characters or not. Some are proper names and others are just fictional names.

Animal characters' features also vary from culture to culture. The animal which is favoured in one culture is not necessarily in another. Thompson (1951: 217) says that folk tradition is very careful in its choice of animals, so as to make the human actions as nearly appropriate as possible. According to Werner (1995: 25), for instance, most African stories, including Rwandan folktales, favour hares. Hare is then, as Werner (1995: 254) says, the most prominent figure in African folktales. Werner (1995: 26) goes on to say that the hare is replaced by another animal in places where there are no hares (it is replaced by the antelope in Congo for instance). Werner also says that these two small and/or weak animals are made the principal heroes of African folklore because Africans believe that the strong cannot always have things their own way. On the contrary, the big and strong animals like the lion and the elephant stand for stupid, brutal force and are the foils and dupes, whose strength and fierceness are no match for the nimble wits of the little hare and the slow, patient wisdom of the tortoise. The hyena, however, in most African folktales, particularly in Rwandan tales, gets the worst character and the tortoise does often get the better of the hare himself, thanks to, as Werner says, its quiet and dogged determination.

Other cultures favour different animals. European and American folktales favour, for instance, the rabbit, the wolf and the fox (Thompson, 1951: 217). In India, according to Werner (1995: 253), it is the jackal which plays clever tricks on stronger and fiercer animals. Jackals are also significant in South African folktales.

Rwandan animal tales, in particular, are centred on the hare and the hyena. Hare has such an important place in Rwandan folktales that it has even been given a special name, namely 'Bakame', by which it goes in most tales. It is pictured as a small animal, but cunning and intelligent, which uses its wits to live to the detriment of big animals like the elephant, the lion and the tiger. However, the animal which always falls victim to Bakame's wits is the hyena, which seems to be disliked by all people and pictured as the most stupid animal of all. This is not certainly mere chance. It is related to the fact that

hyenas were animals which used, in ancient times when there were still a lot of bushes in Rwanda and when people lived in huts made of grass, to invade households in search of goats and sheep. Actually, hyenas happened to be animals against which Rwandans were constantly fighting and this is certainly at the origin of the dislike that Rwandans have for them and that is the reason why hyenas are pictured as bad, wicked and stupid animals in Rwandan folktales.

As far as inanimate objects are concerned, the use of one or the other object undoubtedly depends on how people in a culture consider that object. It depends mostly on beliefs and customs.

Rwandans make use of different objects which assume roles in folktales. These include, for instance, 'ingasire' (a grinding stone) and 'utubindi' (water pots) as found in the tale *'Nyabwangu na Nyabucurere'* (*Nyabwangu and Nyabucurere*) to be analysed in this study. Other inanimate objects found in Rwandan folktales include baskets, a shepherd's crook, and so on.

As to setting, this is an important element in Rwandan folktales as it is in all literature. As mentioned earlier, setting refers to place and time. According to Norton (1987: 91), setting helps the reader or listener share what a story's characters see, smell, hear, and touch, as well as making characters' values, actions, and conflicts more understandable.

Time in folktales is always the far distant past and this is normally specified from the very beginning of the folktales. That is the reason why folktales in different cultures start with a "once upon a time" and other expressions that place the listener in the past. However, as mentioned earlier, each culture or folk has its own way of placing the listener in the past by using different words.

As far as place is concerned, each tale is placed in the physical milieu of the culture that it is part of. Geographical location is of course very important for a story to be appropriate in a given context. A European folktale set in place where there is snow may sound unnatural to a central African person who knows nothing about snow or may not be well understood because of the lack of knowledge about snow.

Rwandan folktales have then their own setting. Like most, if not all, folktales, they are also set in the far distant past. It was mentioned earlier that most Rwandan folktales open with

"Kera habayeho …" (Literally 'Long ago there lived' ….). In addition, they are set in Rwanda, and when it comes to referring to a geographical location, this is typical of Rwandan culture. As a matter of fact, geographical names in Kinyarwanda are used to in order to locate an action in its setting.

From the discussion done in this chapter, it is clear that folklore, culture, language and translation are closely related. I have discussed how they are related with a view to justifying why translator should take into account culture when they embark on translating in general and translating folklore in particular. I have also discussed Rwandan folktales and showed how they are embedded in Rwandan culture and have shown characteristics that indicate that they are set in culture of their own.

