

(Re)Translating Cameroon Fulani Poems into English: Challenges and Perspectives

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Fulani, One of the three major African Languages

- About 25 million speakers (Mohamadou 1998:390).
- Spoken in about 20 African countries, with a very large diaspora worldwide .
- Serves as *lingua Franca* in the Northern Cameroon.
- Oral literature (praise songs, epics, poetry, short stories...) but also transcribed with Arabic alphabet.
- Existence of transcribed Oral Fulani literature into Europeans languages (Hampâte Ba, C. Seydou, U. Baumgardt, V. Erlmann, P. Eguchi,...).

Fulani Oral Poetry in Cameroon: The « Mbooku » genre

- « Mbooku » poetry is specific to the Far-North Region of Cameroon (former Diamare Division).
- It has been transcribed, translated and published into French, German and English by three different translators: A. O. Dalil (French); V. Erlmann (German) and P. Eguchi (English).
- Deeply rooted in Fulani Culture (Husbandry, Islamic tradition, *Pulaaku*)

Why (Re)translating?

- “Introducing into the culture a version of something which has already been in existence into another culture, which is deemed worthy of introducing it”. Toury (2012:197)
- Retranslations are **creation of values**; they help to advance Translation Studies by illuminating several key issues that bear directly on practice and research. Venuti (2013:96-98)

Material & Theoretical Framework

Material: Two Fulani « mbooku » poems transcribed and translated into English by the Japanese Paul Kazuhisa Eguchi: "The Wood Ibises" (1980); 170 lines; and "Let' us insult Pella" (1984); 139 lines.

Theoretical Framework: Descriptive Approach to Translation (DTS); Functionalist Theory (Skopos).

I. CHALLENGES IN TRANSLATING FULANI POEMS

A-Linguistic Challenges

Noun Classes

Fulani counts more than 26 noun classes and they are difficult to manage in translation.

Example 1:

Source Text (ST)

Mi juulaayi, mi don yaawna.
Mi taw **malaawa** don joodfi.
"Abba Kiji a waalii jam?«
Mi saan **nyawnga** jaabaaki.
"Abba Kiji ko mbaad-maa-mi?
'Na Sannda Omaru nel-noo-mi.
Ndokkora mo kulu maayo.
(“TWI ” p.142 lines 107-113)

Target Text (TT)

I gave up the prayer and hurried.
I found **the malicious man** sitting.
"Abba Kiji, good morning."
I greeted him, but **the unpleasant man** did not answer.
"Abba Kiji, what have I done to you?
Sannda Omaru sent me.
Please give him some wood ibises from the river.
(“TWI ” p.143, lines 107-113)

Malaawa = from the noun class of « nga », magnifier, pejorative in this context. Normally, malaajo = from the noun class of « o », sing. , for human being category.

The translator uses “malicious man ” to render the pejorative “malaawa”, which seems to be more or less appropriate.

The same with “nyawnga” (nyawdo=sick man) translated as “the unpleasant man”.

Rhetorical figures

Metaphors

Example 2:

ST

galaje paldugal waalde,
daande iyirugal yolnde,

kallunga yeeso bu'e ajamndi.
 (“LIP”, p. 208, Lines 52-5)

TT

His cheek bones are like a bar to close the kraal.
His neck is like a bar of the gate.

The face of the ugly man is like black iron.
 (“LIP”, p. 209, Lines 52-5)

The poet uses metaphors to describe the person he insults. The use of the metaphors aims at describing how ugly the person insulted is.

The translator uses comparison to transfer the metaphor of the ST. Comparison is achieved through the use of comparative adverb 'like', whereas metaphor compares without the comparative adverb. This strategy reduces the effect of the insult contained in the ST.

Wordplays

Example 3

ST

Haa **pelen Pella**.

Sewbe, kakkilanon jabre.

Pella wadī ko **pelden** dūm.

Pella hudam-no, mi huutoto mo.

(“TWI ” , lines 1-4, p. 206)

TT

Let us **insult Pella**.

Thin men, be carefu1'of the chorus.

Pella gave us cause to **insult** him.

Pella insulted me. So I will return the insult.

(“TWI ” , lines 1-4, p. 207)

Pelen = 1st pers., plural of the verb “FELGO”, which means “to blame”, “to reprove”. “Pella” means literary “big bald”. Used as pejorative nick name by the poet. Plays with words Pelen/Pella.

Translated by **insult**. Though the whole poem is an insult to Pella, the nicknamed, **loss** of the original **wordplay**.

Possible translation of the wordplay partially reconstructed:

Let us **blame Big Bald** / **Big Bald** gave us cause to **blame** him

Cultural Challenges

Allusions

“refers [...] to a varieties of uses of preformed in either its original or a modified for, and to proper names, to convey often implicit meaning” Leppihalme (1997:3).

Allusions are challenges to translators since their carry cultural and implicit meanings which are not always readily transferrable.

Example 4

ST

Njaa-mi ndarnitin-moo-mi.
Mbii-mi yoo ngaya caylaangaa.
Yeeso hokkita fuunaange,
ngada **jiido** njowa **qulhuwa**,
ngada **naasi** ajowa **falaqi**.
dum boo Pella anndaa dum.
 (“LIP”, p.208-210, lines 67-72)

TT

I went to make him face toward **Mecca**.
I said, "You are a fool.
Your face should look toward the east.
Recite the **Al-Fatihah** and add the **Al-Ikhlās**.
Recite the **Al-Nas** and add the **Al-Falaq**."
He did not know this either.
 (“LIP”, p.209-211, lines 67-72)

The highlighted are allusions* to Muslims' compulsory prayers. The poet uses the '**localized**'** Fulani titles of the *Surats* one may use when praying. The translation difficulty occurs when the translator is not aware of these titles in Fulani. The translator has made them more '**globalized**'** for foreign readers who are aware of Muslims' worshiping practices. He uses the appropriate standard Arabic titles.

Furthermore, "**Mecca**" in the first line is added by the translator. It is not mentioned in the ST.

**Many strategies for translating allusions are proposed by Leppihalme (1997).*

*** Borrowed from Nord (2013).*

Humour

“When it comes to translating humor, the operation proves to be as desperate as that of translating poetry”. (Diot 1989: 84)

➤ The difficulties are both at linguistic and cultural levels.

Example 5

ST

Pella ŋanci wi'i juulan,
yeeso hokkiti gal fommba,
habbiraango luuyaango,
waaciico nga yowi **ndolndol**.
(“LIP”, p.208-210, lines 62-65)

TT

Pella lied and said he would pray.
He stood up, faced toward the south,
magnified Allah's name with a whistle,
and sang **circumcision chants**.
(“LIP”, p.209-211, lines 62-65)

“**Waaciico**” and “**ndolndol**” are two of the many initiation songs by circumcised children and has nothing to do with prayers, but with traditional culture. Pella uses them when praying because he knows nothing about Muslim religion. Humor lies in the confusion of traditional culture and religion, showing that Pella is a fake Muslim. The translator uses explicitation since there are no *linguistic* equivalents of ‘**waciico**’ and ‘**ndolndol**’ into the TL.

II. PERSPECTIVES

- Numerous documents of Fulani and other African oral literature in Cameroon and elsewhere still not transcribed and not translated. There is so much to do in this area as far as literary translation is concerned.
- The existing transcribed and translated Fulani oral literature offers a good material to Translation Studies, thus contributing to a new impetus in the development of an ever growing TS.

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