



LITERATURE, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION: THE CASE OF THE TRANSLATION OF CULINARY PRACTICES IN LIGNY'S *LE MONDE S'EFFONDRE* (THE FRENCH TRANSLATION OF CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*)

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ABSTRACT

In Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe, like most African writers, communicates the African experience, culture and tradition to the Western world through their works. However, most of these texts are translated by Europeans. This paper is interested in the translation of the culinary practices given to us in the novel. The African traditional culinary practices are sharp contrasts to the practices of the European culture where the translator, Michel Ligny originates from. This paper attempts to evaluate how well the translator has surmounted the lexical, semantic, linguistic and meta-linguistic problems encountered in the work. The paper found out that in literary translation, one does not just translate the ideas but also the culture of the source text. The paper concludes that though the translator has been able to transfer meanings, his translation is characterised by inconsistencies, which has resulted in failure to communicate to the target readers, in most instances, the original information of the author.

KEYWORDS: literature, language, Translation, communication, culture.

INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, like most African literary texts, was translated by a European. The African traditional culinary practices as given to us in the novel, are sharp contrasts to the practices of the European culture where the translator, Michel Ligny originates from. The translation of cultural elements constitutes the bulk of difficulties faced by the translator of a text that originates from a culture that is different from the culture of the translator. Cultural elements, according to Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2007), include language, history, religion, social organisations and values. The way people cook, eat, what they cook and the utensils they use, are all matters of culture. Kitchen practices, as far as this article is concerned, therefore, covers cooking and eating habits, food items and utensils.



There are two key words in this work namely translation and culture and they shall be visited very briefly.

Translation

The phenomenon called “translation” has been defined in many ways by many scholars. According to Nida and Taber (1974:12), translation consists of reproducing in the receptor language, the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style. For Catford (1965:20), translation is the replacement of textual material in the Source Language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language, that is, an operation performed on language whereby a text is substituted in one language for a text in another. For Newmark (1991:27) translation is transferring the meaning of a stretch or a unit of language, the whole or a part of a text, from one language to another. Marianne Lederer (1994:11) defines it as a process which :

consiste à comprendre le texte original, à déverbaliser sa forme linguistique et à exprimer d’une autre langue les idées comprises et les sentiments ressentis.

[involves understanding the original text, deverbalising its linguistic form and expressing, in another language, the ideas it contains, and the sentiments felt]. (*All translations in this paper except otherwise stated are ours*)

Translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and by implication two cultural traditions. Thus, every translator faces the challenges of translating cultural aspects implicit in a *Source Text* (ST) and of finding the most appropriate technique of successfully conveying these cultural aspects in the *Target Language* (TL). This is why Heidi Holzer (<http://noveladventures>) (2001) asserts that:

there is nothing more satisfying than finding the perfect word, one that truly expresses the nuances of meaning in the ST

In literary translation, one does not translate just the ideas but also the culture of the source text. Translating the ideas poses no great challenges, most of the time. It is the translation of the cultural elements that constitutes the bulk of difficulties faced by the translator. The problem of translating culture varies in scope and dimension depending on the culture and the linguistic gap between the two (or more) languages concerned. The implications of cultural transfer in translation may take diverse dimensions including lexical content, syntax, ideologies as well as the ways of life in a given culture. It is left to the translator to decide on



the importance given to certain cultural aspects and to what extent it is necessary or desirable to translate them into the TL. Nevertheless, the translator must always remember the aims of the ST as these will have serious implications for translation. The translator must also remember the intended readership for both the ST and TT.

Culture

Culture is one phenomenon, according to Isamah (1993), on which there is a rare consensus among scholars. This is because culture is ubiquitous, complex, all pervasive and difficult to define. It is a concept that is directly linked with the society and is commonly seen as the way of life of a people or community. Harrison and Huntington (2000), assert that the term has had multiple meanings in different disciplines and different contexts. Williams(1961:57-58), defines culture as a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meaning and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. For Ojo-Ade (1989), the way people live is their culture; the totality of their beliefs, codes of conduct, technique, all elements that are necessary for existence and survival in a social setting. Culture, for Tylor (1958:1) 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. According to Hofstede (2001) culture is to a human collective what personality is to an individual. However,

The translation of culinary practices in *Le monde s'effondre*

Things Fall Apart is a novel depicting the advent of the white man into Ibo society and culture. The setting of the story is an Igbo village whose ways of life were not much different from those of other African villages, but were quite different from those of the translator of the novel. Attention shall now be given to the translation of culinary practices in the novel and we shall begin with the instance on page 14 of *Things Fall Apart*. Henceforth *Things Fall Apart* and *Le monde s'effondre* shall be referred to as TFA and LMS respectively.

(i). Everybody thanked Okonkwo and the neighbours brought out their *drinking horns* from the goatskin bags they carried... The younger of his sons, who was also the youngest man in the group moved to the centre, raised the pot on his left knee and began to pour out the wine. The first cup went to Okonkwo, who must taste the wine before anyone else. Then the group



drank, beginning with the eldest man. When everyone had drunk... Nwakibie sent for his wives. Some of them were not at home and only four came in. "Is Anasi not in?" he asked them... Anasi was the first wife and the others could not drink before her, and so they stood waiting. Anasi was a middle-aged woman... she walked up to her husband and accepted the horn from him. She then went down on one knee, drank a little and handed back the horn. She rose, called him by his name and went back to her hut. The other wives drank in the same way, in their proper order, and went away (TFA p. 14-15).

Chacun remercia Okonkwo et les voisins sortirent leurs cornes à boire des *besaces de peau de chèvre* qu'ils portaient... Le plus jeune de ses fils, qui était également l'homme le plus jeune du groupe, vint se placer au centre, appuya le pot sur son genou gauche et commença à verser le vin. La première coupe fut pour Okonkwo, qui devait goûter son vin avant tout autre. Puis le groupe but, encommençant par l'homme le plus âgé. Quand chacun eut bu... Nwakibie envoya chercher ses femmes. Plusieurs d'entre elles n'étaient pas à la maison et il n'en entra que quatre. - Anasi, n'est-elle pas là? Leur demanda-t-il... Anasi était la première femme et les autres ne pouvaient boire avant elle, ainsi restèrent – elles à attendre. Anasi était une femme d'âge moyen... Elle se dirigea vers son mari et accepta la corne de ses mains. Elle se mit alors sur un genou, but une gorgée et rendit la corne... Elle se leva, l'appela par son nom et retourna dans sa case. Les autres épouses burent de la même manière, dans l'ordre convenable, et s'en allèrent (LMS p. 29).

This first example is a typical picture of life in a polygamous, African family. It begins by depicting the eating habit among Africans in a social gathering. Whoever brings the wine must taste it first, in the presence of all present before the others follow suit. Ligny has tried in translating this cultural picture painted by Achebe into the target language. He has translated *drinking horns* correctly as *corne à boire*. In the case of the order of drinking in a polygamous setting, respecting the order of seniority, Ligny has translated the message literally.

(ii). The men in the *Obi*, had already begun to drink the palm-wine which Akueke's suitor had brought... Ibe... filled the first horn and gave to his father. Then he poured out for the others. Okonkwo brought out his big horn from the goatskin bag... and gave it to Ibe to fill. As the men drank, they talked about everything except the thing for which they had gathered. It was only after the pot had been emptied that the suitor's father cleared his voice and announced the object of their visit. (TFA p. 50).



Dans *l'Obi*, les hommes avaient déjà commencé à boire le vin de palme que le prétendant d'Akueke avait apporté... Ibe...remplit la première corne et la donna à son père. Puis il servit les autres. Okonkwo sortit sa grande corne de son sac de peau de chèvre...et la donna à remplir à Ibe. Tout en buvant, les hommes parlèrent de tout sauf de l'affaire qui les avait rassemblés. (LMS p. 88-89).

(iii). At last the young man who was pouring out the wine held up half a horn of the thick, white dregs and said, "what we are eating is finished..." "We have seenit", the others replied...After the wine had been drunk Okonkwo laidhis difficulties before Nwakibie (TFA p. 15).

A la fin, le jeune homme qui versait le vin leva une corne à demi pleine de lie épaisse et blanche et dit: - Ce que nous sommes en train de manger est terminé. - Nous l'avons constaté, répondirent les autres... Une fois le vinbu, Okonkwo exposa ses difficultés à Nwakibie (LMS p. 30-31).

In examples (ii) and (iii), Achebe shows that in the African culture, serious discussions are suspended when eating or drinking is in progress. Important matters are discussed only after eating. The cultural loan-word *Obi* in example (ii) has been left untranslated by Ligny too, the obvious reason being that the word has no English or French equivalent. It is noticed here also, that Ligny has translated *goatskin bag* as *sac de peau de chèvre*and not *besace de peau de chèvre*, as he did in example (i) The other cultural items, *thick, white dregs, horn*, have been adequately translated as *lie épaisse et blanche* and *corne*, respectively.

(iv). The Feast of the New Yam was held every year before the harvest began... Men and women, young and old, looked forward to the New Yam Festival... All cooking-pots, calabashes and wooden bowls were thoroughly washed, especially the wooden mortar in which yam was pounded. Yam, foo-foo and vegetable soup was the chief food in the celebration. (TFA p. 26).

La Fête de la Nouvelle Igname se tenait chaque année avant le début de la récolte...Hommes et femmes, jeunes et vieux, attendaient avec impatience la Fête de laNouvelle Igname... Toutes les marmites, les calebasses et les jattes de bois étaient soigneusement nettoyées, en particulier le mortier de bois dans lequel on pilait l'igname. Le fofò d'igname accompagné de soupe de légumes était la principale nourriture de cette célébration. (LMS p. 49-50).



(v)...no matter how heavily the family ate or how many friends and relations they invited from neighbouring villages, there was always a huge quantity of food left over at the end of the day. The story was told of a wealthy man who set before his guests a mound of foo-foo so high that those who sat on one side could not see what was happening on the other and it was not until late in the evening that one of them saw for the first time his in-law who had arrived during the course of the meal and had fallen to on the opposite side. It was only then that they exchanged greetings and shook hands over what was left of the food. (TFA p. 26).

...quelle que soit l'avidité avec laquelle mangeait la famille ou le nombre d'amis et de parents invités des villages voisins, il restait toujours une énorme quantité de nourriture à la fin de la journée. On racontait toujours l'histoire d'un homme riche qui avait placé devant ses hôtes une si haute montagne de fofo que ceux qui étaient assis d'un côté ne pouvaient voir ce qui se passait de l'autre, et il fallut attendre jusque tard dans la soirée pour que l'un d'eux voie pour la première fois son frère par alliance qui était arrivé pendant le repas et s'était attablé du côté opposé, ce fut alors seulement qu'ils échangèrent de congratulations et se serrèrent la main par-dessus ce qui restait de la nourriture. (LMS p. 50).

The example cited in (iv), offers us a list of some of the cooking and eating utensils in the African culture. These items are *cooking pots*, *calabashes*, *wooden bowls* and *wooden mortar* which Ligny has translated as *marmites*, *calebases*, *jattes de bois* et *mortier de bois* respectively. The other cultural items, *yam foo-foo* and *vegetable soup* have been translated as *le fofod'ignameetsoupe de legumes*. In example (v), Achebe paints a familiar and typically African picture of communal eating. In interpreting the symbolic significance of food in society, Freud (1938), argues that the notion of community is based upon primal conceptions of the meaning and drinking in common. According to Freud, to eat and drink with someone is at the same time a symbol and a confirmation of social community and the assumption of mutual obligation.

In the case of the African culture, it is not just a question of placing a large container of food from which individuals dish out a portion on to their plates or is served a plate each to eat individually, as is the practice in Europe and other Western cultures. It is a question of many people sitting round this large container of food, and eating directly from this one, large container (usually with the fingers) at the same time. Such occasions provide opportunities for elders to bandy words and use proverbs freely. According to Solomon (2019), proverbs are of significant value in the language of members of the community, particularly, amongst



rural people. Ojo (2015) opines that proverbs are reflections and expressions of wisdom, ethics, philosophy and beliefs of a given society. This is the culture painted in (v).

Eating from a common plate signifies solidarity and feelings of community, reinforces familiar and social tie (Fran Osseo – Asare, 2005). Sometimes, food does not only serve to satisfy physical hunger. Writing on food symbolism, Madeira (1989:212) distinguishes nutritive and non-nutritive uses of food. By non-nutritive uses, she means: those uses not primarily associated with satisfying physical hunger and body nourishment but as a component of social interaction, of prestige or status, a means of maintaining and ending social relationships.

The example in (v) about the wealthy man and his extra-ordinary mountain of foo-foo, served this second function of food, that is non-nutritive, as given by Madeira. The man simply wanted to display his wealth and protect his status and prestige. This cultural picture, as well as its significance, has been successfully repainted in the target language by Ligny. We are, however, of the opinion that *greetings* should have been translated as *salutations* and not *congratulations*.

(vi). “Will you give Ezinma some fire to bring to me?” Her own children... had gone to the *stream*. Ekwefi put a few *live coals* into a piece of *brokenpot* and Ezinma carried it across the clean-swept *compound* to Nwoye’s mother.

“Thank you, Nma,” she said. She was peeling new yams and in a basket beside her were green vegetables and beans. “Let me make the fire for you,” Ezinma offered.

“Thank you”, *Ezigbo*, she said. She often called her *Ezigbo* which means *the good one*. Ezinma went outside and brought some sticks from a huge *bundle of firewood*. She broke them into little pieces across the sole of her feet and began to build a fire, blowing it with her breath.

“You will blow your eyes out,” said Nwoye’s mother... “use the fan...” Ezinma’s fire was now sending up thick clouds of smoke. She went on fanning it until it burst into flames (TFA p. 30).

- Veux-tu donner à Ezinma un peu de feu pour qu’elle me l’apporte? Ses propres enfants... étaient allés à la *rivière*. Ekwefi mit quelques *charbons ardents* dans un *tesson de marmite* et Ezinma les porta à travers *le domaine bien balayé*.

-Merci, Nma, dit-elle. Elle pilait des ignames nouvelles, et dans un panier à côté d’elle il y avait des légumes verts et des haricots.

-Laisse-moi faire le feu pour toi, proposa Ezinma.



-Merci, *Ezigbo*, dit-elle. Elle l'appelait souvent *Ezigbo*, qui signifie *celle qui est bonne*. Ezinma sortit et rapporta quelques petites branches d'un énorme *fagot de bois à brûler*. Elle les brisa en petits morceaux sur sa plantede pied et se mit à bâtir un feu, soufflant dessus avec sa bouche.

-Tu vas te faire sortir les yeux de la tête à souffler comme ça, dit la mère de Nwoye...-prends l'éventail... Le feu d'Ezinma dégagait maintenant d'épais nuages defumée. Elle continua à l'éventer jusqu'à ce que les flames éclatent (LMS p. 55-56).

Here we see the manner and the process of building a fire for cooking in an African setting. Before the arrival of the white man on the black soil, there was nothing like matches. Fires were made in the manner given in the fore-going example, that is, by borrowing live coals from a neighbour's fire. The cultural items in this example are *stream*, *live coals*, *broken pot*, *compound*, *bundle of firewood*. Ligny has rendered them as follows: *rivière*, *charbonsardents*, *tesson de marmite*, *domaine* and *fagot de bois à brûler*, respectively.

Some of these translations are all right while some are not and we would like to revisit them. We begin with *stream* which Ligny has translated as *rivière*. The equivalent of *stream* in French is *ruisseau*, while *rivière* means *river* in English. Africans fish or bathe in the river but drink and cook from streams. River water is generally polluted and unfit for consumption. Stream water, on the other hand, is quite clean and communities preserve the sanitary conditions of streams seriously. Thus, Ligny's translation is not proper because streams and rivers, though both bodies of water, are not synonymous.

Another mistranslation is *compound* which Ligny has rendered as *domaine*. The *Concise Oxford Hachette French Dictionary* gives the following translations of the noun, *compound*, according to the contexts the word can be used as indicated in the brackets:

- a. (enclosure) enceinte
- b. (chemistry) compose
- c. (word) mot
- compose.
- d. (mixture) composé (de) etc.

Of all these options, the one closest to *compound* in the context given in *Things Fall Apart*, is *enceinte*, which Ligny did not use. Moreover, there is a more commonly used word to denote the word *compound* in Francophone Africa. That word is *concession*. We are, thus, of the opinion that the word *compound* would have been better translated as *concession* and not *domaine*.

We now come to the expression *firewood*. Ligny's translation is tautological. The word, *firewood* means *bois à brûler* in French. However, *bundle of firewood* is simply called



fagot in French. Thus, Ligny's rendition of *bundle of firewood* as *fagot de bois à brûler* is tautological. Here is what we mean:

Achebe: Ezinma went outside and brought some sticks from *a huge bundle of firewood*.

Ligny: Ezinma sortit et rapporta quelques petites branches d'un *énorme fagot de bois à brûler*.

Our Suggestion: Ezinma sortit et rapporta quelques petites branches d'un énorme fagot.

In the case of the idiomatic expression, *you will blow your eyes out*, Ligny has used a long, winding equivalent which is actually a modulation:

Tu vas te faire sortir les yeux de la tête à souffler comme ça.

Even though this modulated version of Ligny's carries the sense of the message in the source text, the poetic beauty of the idiomatic expression in the original text is completely lost.

(vii). ...The drums begin at noon but the wrestling waits until the sun begins to sink. "Go and see if your father has brought out yams for the afternoon." "He has. Nwoye's mother is already cooking." "Go and bring our own, then. We must cook quickly or we shall be late for the wrestling" (TFA p. 30).

...les tambours commencent à midi mais pour le combat on attend que le soleil commence à s'enfoncer.

- Va voir si ton père a sorti des ignames pour l'après – midi.
- C'est fait. La mère de Nwoye est déjà en train de faire la cuisine.
- Va chercher les nôtres, alors. Nous devons faire la cuisine rapidement ou nous serons en retard pour le combat (LMS p. 57).

(viii). Ekwefi ladled her husband's share of the pottage into a bowl and covered it. Ezinma took it to him in his *Obi*. Okonkwo was sitting on a goatskin already eating his first wife's meal. Obiageli, who had bought it from her mother's hut, sat on the floor waiting for him to finish. Ezinma placed her mother's dish before him and sat with Obiageli... He uncovered his second wife's dish and began to eat from it. Obiageli took the first dish and returned to her mother's hut. And then Nkechi came in, bringing the third dish. Nkechi was the daughter of Okonkwo's third wife. (LMS p. 31-32).

Ekwefi versa à la louche dans un bol la part de potage de son mari et la couvrit. Ezinma la lui porta dans son *obi*. Okonkwo, assis sur une peau de chèvre, mangeait déjà le



repas de sa première femme. Obiageli, qui l'avait apporté de la case de sa mère, était assise par terre et attendait qu'il finisse. Ezinma plaça le plat de sa mère devant lui et s'assit avec Obiageli... Il découvrit le plat de sa seconde femme et commença à en manger. Obiageli prit le premier plat et retourna à la case de sa mère. Alors Nkechi entra, apportant le troisième plat. Nkechi était la fille de la troisième épouse d'Okonkwo (LMS p. 58-59).

These two preceding examples portray the symbol and the role of the father in the African culture, as head of a polygamous home. In example (vii), it is the duty of the father to bring out yams from the barn for the women to cook. No woman goes to the barn by herself. In example (viii), we see the mode of eating and serving food in a polygamous setting. Where there are grown up children, the wives do not take the food directly to their husbands all the time. Daughters can sometimes take the food to their fathers to allow their mothers to continue with the serving of food to the children and other members of the family. Fathers are always the first to be served. The food is always taken to him. He is never called to leave his *Obi* to come and eat in any of the other huts in his compound. Another thing to note is that the father must be waited upon while he is eating. Also, no matter the number of wives a man has, he must eat from each of the dishes placed before him to avoid jealousy among the wives. This procedure and the symbolism of the father, together with gender roles have been translated into French by Ligny.

(ix). On the third day he asked his second wife, Ekwefi, to *roast plantains* for him. She prepared it the way he liked – with slices of *oil-bean* and fish... his daughter Ezinma... brought the food to him... Okonkwo ate the food absent-mindedly. "She should have been a boy", he thought, as he looked at his ten year old daughter. He passed her a piece of fish. "Go, and bring me some cold water", he said. Ezinma rushed out... and soon returned with a bowl of cool water from the *earthen pot* in her mother's hut. Okonkwo took the bowl from her and gulped the water down... and pushed the dish aside. Bring me my *bag*, he asked... He searched in it for his *snuff-bottle*... and brought out a *small, flat, ivory spoon*, with which he carried the brown *snuff* to his nostrils (TFA p. 44-45).

Le troisième jour, il demanda à sa seconde femme, Ekwefi, de lui *rôtir des bananes à cuire*. Elle les prépara de la façon qu'il aimait - avec des tranches de *haricots gras* et de poisson... sa fille Ezinma... lui apporta la nourriture... Okonkwo mangea en pensant à autre chose.

- Elle aurait dû être un garçon, pensa-t-il en regardant sa petite fille de dix ans. Il lui donna un morceau de poisson.



- Va me chercher un peu d'eau froide, dit – il. Ezinma se précipita de la case... et revint bientôt avec un bol d'eau froide puisée dans *le pot de terre* qui se trouvait dans la case de sa mère. Okonkwo lui prit le bol des mains et en avala le contenu... et repoussa le plat.

-Apporte-moi ma *besace*, demanda-t-il...Il y chercha sa *bouteille de tabac à priser...et...tira une petite cuiller plate d'ivoire* à l'aide de laquelle il porta le *tabac* brun à ses narines (LMS p. 80-81).

A specific procedure of eating is presented to us in this example and that is the fact that snuff is taken immediately after eating, and not before. As we said earlier, it is children who take the food prepared by their mothers to their fathers, in most cases. The children must wait there until the father finishes eating in case he needs anything, as we see when Okonkwo needed some water to drink.

We now come to the cultural items in this example. We shall list them out in a tabular form since they are a bit many, for easier evaluation.

Achebe	Ligny
roast plantain	rôtir des bananes à cuire
oil bean	de haricots gras
earthen pot	pot de terre
bag	besace
snuff-bottle	bouteille de tabac à priser
small, flat ivory spoon	petite cuiller plate d'ivoire
snuff	tabac

Beginning with the translation of the first item *plantain*, Michel Ligny translates it as *banana* when the two food items are two different species of the same plant. Also, he has rendered *bag* as *besace* which means pouch. The *goatskin bag* referred to, quite often, in the novel, is a big item that can contain even a pouch. Achebe gives detailed information about the goatskin bag carried by the male characters in the narrative as follows:

“Bring me my bag”, he (Okonkwo) asked, and Ezinma brought his goatskin bag from the far end of the hut... *It was a deep bag and took almost the whole length of his arm. It contained other things apart from his snuff-bottle. There was a drinking horn in it, and also a drinking gourd...* (TFA p. 44).

- Apporte-moi ma *besace*, demanda-t-il. Et Ezinma alla chercher la *besace* de peau de chevre à l'autre bout de la case...C'était un sac profond et son bras y disparaissait presque



tout entier. Il contenait d'autres choses en dehors de sa bouteille de tabac à priser. Il y avait dedans une corne à boire, et aussi une gourde à boire (LMS p.80).

Thus, Ligny's rendering of *bag* as *besace*, given the context, is a mistranslation. Apart from these two observations, the other cultural items have been adequately translated.

(x) Ezinma was an only child and the centre of her mother's world... Ekwefi even gave her such delicacies as eggs, which children were rarely allowed to eat because such food tempted them to steal. One day as Ezinma was eating an egg Okonkwo had come in unexpectedly... He was greatly shocked and swore to beat Ekwefi if she dared to give the child eggs again (TFA p. 53-54).

Ezinma était une enfant unique et le centre du monde de sa mère ... Ekwefi lui donnait même des friandises telles que des œufs, que les enfants étaient rarement autorisés à manger parce que ce genre de nourriture leur donnait l'envie de voler. Un jour qu'Ezinma était occupée à manger un œuf, Okonkwo était arrivé à l'improviste de sa case. Il fut vivement choqué et jura de battre Ekwefi si elle osait donner des œufs à l'enfant (LMS p. 94-95).

(xi). Ezinma and her mother sat on a mat on the floor after their supper of *yam foo-foo* and *bitter leaf soup*. A *palm-oil lamp* gave out yellowish light (TFA p. 67).

Ezinma et sa mère étaient assises sur une natte posée à terre, après leur dîner de *foo-foo d'ignames* et de *soupe de viande et de poisson*. Une *lampe à l'huile de palme* répandait une lumière jaunâtre (LMS p. 117).

(xii) Obierika's *compound* was as busy as an ant-hill. Temporary cooking *tripods* were erected on every available space by bringing together three *blocks of sun-dried earth* and making fire in their midst. Cooking pots went up and down the tripods and *foo-foo* was pounded in a hundred mortars. Some of the women cooked the yams and the *cassava*, and others prepared *vegetable soup*. Young men pounded the *foo-foo* or split *firewood* (TFA p. 78-79).

Le *domaine* d'Obierika était aussi actif qu'une fourmilière. On avait dressé dans tous les coins disponibles des *trépieds* provisoires pour y faire la cuisine en assemblant trois par trois des *blocs de terre séchée au soleil* et en allumant un feu au milieu. On ne cessait d'ôter des marmites des trépieds pour en remettre d'autres, et on pilait du *foo-foo* dans une centaine de mortiers. Certaines femmes cuisaient les ignames et la *cassave*, et d'autres préparaient de la soupe de légumes. Les jeunes gens pilaient le *foo-foo* ou coupaient du *bois* pour le feu (LMS p. 138).



(xiii). Very soon after, the in-laws began to arrive...The kola was eaten and the drinking of palm-wine began. Groups of four or five men sat round with a pot in their midst. As the evening wore on, food was presented to the guests. There were huge bowls of foo-foo and steaming pots of soup. There were also pots of *yam pottage*. It was a great feast (TFA p. 83).

Presque aussitôt après, la belle-famille commença à arriver...Ils mangèrent la kola et commencèrent à boire le vin de palme. Des groupes de quatre ou cinq hommes s'asseyaient en cercle avec un pot au milieu d'eux. Comme la soirée se prolongeait, on apporta de quoi manger aux invités. Il y avait d'énormes bols de foo-foo et des pots de soupe fumante. Il y avait aussi des pots de potage d'ignames. Ce fut un grand festin (LMS p. 142-144).

In example (ix), there is actually no cultural word there to be translated. The example is only showing what food item is culturally deemed unfit for children and the reason for its unfitness. This attitude is the exact opposite of that of the culture of the translator. In the Western world, parents give their children eggs, sometimes on a daily basis. In their culture, this particular food item is considered highly fit for growing children because of its nutritional value.

Ligny comes from this culture yet he has transmitted this, supposedly, strange, and silly attitude which reeks with ignorance, into the target language.

There are three cultural items in example (x), namely: *yam*, *foo-foo*, *bitter-leaf soup* and *palm oil lamp*. Ligny has translated them as *foo-foo d'ignames*, *soupe de viande et de poisson* and *lampe à l'huile de palme*. The translations are all acceptable except that in example (v), he translated *foo-foo* as *fofo*. Also, he has translated *bitter leaf soup* as *de soupe de viande et de poisson*. We propose the following translations:

Achebe: Ezinma and her mother sat on a mat on the floor after their supper of *yam foo-foo and bitter-leaf soup*.

Ligny: Ezinma et sa mère étaient assises sur une natte posée à terre, après leur dîner de *foo-foo d'ignames et de soupe de viande et de poisson*.

Our Suggestion: Ezinma et sa mère étaient assises sur une natte posée à terre, après leur dîner de *foo-foo d'ignames et de soupe de légumes amères*.

The choice of *domaine* as the equivalent of *compound* in example (xi) is unsuitable. *Compound*, as given in the context, refers to a specific place, a place where people live. The term *compound* had already been used by Achebe on page ten where he gives an explicit description of what it means in the Igbo culture as follows:



Okonkwo's prosperity was visible in his household. He had a large compound enclosed by a thick wall of red earth. His own hut, or *Obi*, stood immediately behind the only gate in the red walls. Each of his three wives had her own hut, which together formed a half moon behind the *Obi*. The barn was built against one end of the red walls. ...Near the barn was a small house, the *medicine house*... (TFA p. 10).

La prospérité d'Okonkwo était visible dans son foyer. Il possédait *un vaste terrain* entouré d'un mur épais de terre rouge. Sa case personnelle, ou *Obi*, était située immédiatement derrière l'unique entrée aménagée dans les murs rouges. Chacune de ses trois femmes avait sa case personnelle, et ces cases étaient disposées en demi-lune derrière *l'Obi*. La grange se dressait à l'une des extrémités des murs rouges... Près de la grange, il y avait une maisonnette, la maison de médecine... (LMS p. 22-23).

Even in his translation of the description of *compound*, as given by Achebe above, we notice that Ligny uses a general term *terrain* to translate *compound*. The term *terrain* is not just too general but also too vague and misleading. It makes one think of a *farm*, or somewhere meant for cultivation of sorts, instead of a place where a family lives.

Coming back to the example under study, that is (xi), we see that Ligny no longer uses *terrain* as the equivalent of *compound* but opts for *domaine*, another term which is equally too vague and too general. *Domaine* here, as used by Ligny makes one think of a *kingdom*, and Obierika as a sort of *ruler* instead of just an ordinary villager, albeit a rich one. The equivalent of *compound*, especially in Francophone Africa, is *concession*, though the standard French for it is *enceinte*.

Writing on her experience in translating *Arrow of God*, another novel by Chinua Achebe, into French, the translator, d'Almeida (1981:2), has this to say:

when it is an African person who is translating an African writer, impersonation is somewhat easier and more effective because the African person is more familiar with the cultural background in which the actions occur and in which the characters are set. Religious rituals, festivals, customs and even day-to-day occurrences are seen from within because they are part of a shared experience.

We are not entirely in agreement with d'Almeida's submission because there are some westernised Africans who do not know a farthing about the African culture. D'Almeida's opinion is, to a certain extent, too parochial. She refers to Africa as if it is a country instead of a continent. Africa is made up of many countries, each having diverse cultures. Impersonation, as she puts it, may not be as easy and as realistic as she obviously



believes. A Nigerian translator of, perhaps, Yoruba origin, who has never lived in East Africa, cannot *easily* impersonate if he is translating a text originating from the Masai culture, for example. The Masai is a tribe residing in East Africa. According to d'Almeida, if Ligny had been African, he would have translated the cultural item correctly. That is to say, "impersonation" (as she puts it), would have been easier for him. We do not agree with this assertion. We would rather say that *when it is an African person who is familiar with the African culture*, impersonation is easier. We know that every Black African comes from a *compound* which makes the term very common among Africans. But assuming that every African person is familiar with the concept is not tenable. There are Africans born and bred in Europe and America and who have never been to Africa. Such Africans may not be able to impersonate as easily as d'Almeida asserts.

Example (xii) is another instance of the mode of eating in the African culture. Eating alone, that is, from individual plates or pots, is un-African. In the example we see that *groups of four or five men sat round with a pot in their midst*. Ligny has captured this practice successfully and rendered it into the target language. The other cultural item, *yam pottage*, has been translated as *potage d'igname* which is quite acceptable.

(xiii). Okonkwo's first wife soon finished her cooking and set before their guests a big meal of *pounded yams* and *bitter-leaf soup*. Okonkwo's son Nwoye brought in a pot of sweet wine tapped from the *raffia palm*... Ezinma brought them a bowl of water with which to wash their hands. After that they began to eat and to drink the wine (TFA p. 99).

La première femme d'Okonkwoa bientôt finisa cuisine et installa devant leurs hôtes un grand repas *d'ignames écrasés* et de *soupe de légumes*. Le fils d'Okonkwo, Nwoye apporta un pot de vindoux tiré du *palmier raffia*... Ezinma leur apporta un bol d'eau pour se laver les mains. Après quoi, ils commencèrent à manger et à boire le vin (LMS p. 170-171).

(xiv). And so three *goats* were *slaughtered* and a number of fowls... As the broken kola nuts were passed round, Okonkwo's wives and children and those who came to help them with the cooking began to bring out the food... Yam pottage was served first because it was lighter than foo-foo and because yam always came first. Then the foo-foo was served... (TFA p. 117).

C'est ainsi que trois *agneaux* furent *sacrifiés* avec un grand nombre de poulets... Tandis que les noix de cola brisée faisaient le tour, les femmes et les enfants d'Okonkwo et ceux qui étaient venus les aider à faire la cuisine commencèrent à apporter la nourriture... Le



potage d'ignames fut servi le premier parcequ'il était plus léger que le foo-foo et parce que lesignames tiennent toujours la première place, puison servit le foo-foo (LMS p. 200-201).

In example (xiii), we come across cultural items which we had already discussed earlier in this work. We have decided to take cognisance of them again, here, because we notice some inconsistencies in Ligny's translations concerning these cultural elements. These are *pounded yam* and *bitter leaf soup*. This is how Ligny translated *pounded yam* earlier: After kola nuts had been presented and eaten, the people of the sky set before their guests, the most delectable dishes Tortoise had ever seen or dreamt of... There was *pounded yam* and also yam potage cooked with palm-oil and fresh fish (TFA p. 69).

Après que des noix de cola eurent été présentées et mangées, les gens du ciel posèrent devant leurs hôtes les mets les plus délectables que Tortue eût jamais vus ou eûtjamais imaginés... Il y avait de *l'igname piléet* aussi du potage d'igname cuit avec de l'huile de palme et du poisson frais (LMS p. 120).

Rendering the same cultural item *pounded yam* first as *l'ignamepilée* and later on as *l'ignameécrasé*, might confuse the target language readers. The readers may think the two items are two different kinds of food whereas they are one and the same in the original version in the source language.

We now come to *bitter leaf soup*. Here are the renditions of Ligny for this single cultural item:

- (a) La soupe de viande et de poisson (LMS p. 11).
- (b) La soupe de viande et de poisson (LMS p. 200).
- (c) de soupe de légumes., (LMS p. 170).

Here, again, the target language readers may not know it is the same type of soup that is in question here.

Another cultural practice in this example is the manner of eating. Achebe shows us that in the African culture, people eat with their fingers and not with cutlery as is the case in the culture of our translator. Also, Africans do not just begin to eat with their hands. They, first, wash the hands. Ligny has rendered this cultural practice acceptably into the target language.

In example (xiv), the order of presenting different dishes to guests, that is beginning with the lightest food, has also been properly rendered by the translator. Nevertheless, he has translated *goats* as *agneaux*. This is a mistranslation. The equivalent of *goat* in French is



chèvre. *Agneau* means *lamb* in English. *Goat* and *lamb* are two different animals. Also, Ligny's choice of the verb *sacrifiés* is worrisome. The verb *sacrifice* is usually associated with killing for ritual purposes, that is, there is always a religious undertone when the verb *sacrifice* is used pertaining to the killing of animals. Using the verb *sacrifier*, in the context given, will give the target readers the impression that Okonkwo was performing a ritual of sorts, instead of just organising an ordinary farewell feast for his kith and kin.

CONCLUSION

Language, and the way it is used in communication, can either inform or confuse. Writers communicate with their readers through written language. African writers portray the African culture, tradition, world-views, experiences, and so on, through their works to authenticate the African heritage as opposed to the biased and distorted image of Africa and the Africans depicted by European early writings on the Black continent. Translating such works enables the messages therein to enjoy a wider readership. Translators of African literary texts, therefore, should ensure fidelity as much as possible in order to arrive at faithful and acceptable translations. They should also be conversant with the culture of the place from which a text originates from in order to avoid mistranslations, inconsistencies, omissions, over-translations and under-translations. Our position on the translations, therefore, is that due to the several omissions and misrepresentation of sequences in many instances, the French version of *Things Fall Apart* needs a new edition that will reflect the corrections we have pointed out in this paper. Accepting these versions, when they were first published, was unjustified.

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