Analysis on the Semantics, Syntax, Equivalence, Fluency and Authenticity of Seif Salum's Poem Entitled "Ewe Bibi Mwenye Enzi" Translated into English as "This Love"

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the semantics, syntax, equivalence, fluency and authenticity of the translation of a Swahili poem entitled "Ewe Bibi Mwenye Enzi" by Seif Salum which was translated into English by the poetry translation workshop from the site http://www.poetrytranslation.org/poems/in/swahili/P12 as "This Love". The introductory part discusses and pays recognition to the concept of untranslatability of the poetry where writers, such as Adam Czerniawski, Hatim Basil and Munday Jeremy, second the idea that poetry is untranslatable since poetry is a reflection of a particular society. Poetry also uses language but language is the reflection of people's definition of their immediate environment, hence in that sense poetry is untranslatable since different societies have different views of their environments and the world. However, due to the increased curiosity which is partly a result of globalization of the world, people want to have diverse knowledge of everything. This makes it necessary to translate poetry anyway. In this case, poems, such as this one, have also been translated. Therefore, this paper tries to make analysis on how the change of language from Swahili to English have affected the semantics, syntax, equivalence, fluency and authenticity of the style and message of the poem.

Keywords: *authenticity, message, poetry, style, translatability*

INTRODUCTION

This section introduces the poem and gives a short description about the author. It also gives a brief description on the points of view of different scholars on the translatability of poems.

About the Poem

This poem, "Ewe Bibi Mwenye Enzi", was written by Seif Salum, a poet from Zanzibar, Tanzania Island and was translated into English by the poetry translation workshop from the site http://www.poetrytranslation.org/poems/in/swahili/P12. In the poem, the persona is a man addressing a woman whom she is in love with. The persona laments that the lady is not romantic to him and that he feels lonely and heartbroken so he is pleasing her to remember the promises they made when their love was at the beginning point. The persona goes on by insisting that his love is true, hence the lady should not let go of him.

Translatability of Poetry

Talking about translation of poetry, Czerniawski (1994) points out that translation happens when there is an identity of meaning between the source language and the target language. This can be observed in government communiqués and legal documents. However, the fact that there is no clear test of how much meaning the poetry is supposed to convey, then

poetry, even if it is concerned with meaning, is not troubled with it exclusively. Hence, its translation is not anticipated to pass the identity test. This leads to the hostility to which, in its extreme form aggregates to a claim that poetry is virtually untranslatable since the expected similitude is lacking. Contributing to the notion that poetry is untranslatable, Hatim and Munday (2004) argue that the real problems are not in the existence of the corresponding literary genres, but in the manner in which such diverse forms are regarded by the people in question. So, we can successfully translate a poem from one language to another but what we have to put in our mind is the receptors of the target language to which most often is difficult to conform to their culture and definition of the world. Hatim and Munday (2004) give an example of epic and didactic poetry which is very little used in the western world, but in many parts of Asia they are very popular and have much of the same value that they possessed in biblical times.

However, the claims above do not halt us from doing translation of poetry. In this globalized vast world, countries have become villages where people interact socially and culturally. Hence, it raises the need for people from all cultures to learn and teach any other cultures. Hollander (1945) claims that a poet is not a man speaking to a specific audience but the poem itself is nothing more than a 'voice' articulating a 'meaning', so it is impossible to justify a translated poem appealing to 'the reader' for its currency, its validation, or its continuing life. He claims that the argument about 'translatability' and 'untranslatability' has been abused, not least because texts may become quintessentially translatable by virtue of the fact that their 'originals' were historically ahead of their time, so that history itself has demanded their 'potentially eternal afterlife'. What is crucial is that the original should be recognizable in the copy. A resemblance

may exist even in a drawing pencil which by definition reproduces the colour of the sitter's eyes. Czerniawski (1994) seems to be pointing to the brute fact that languages, with their differing word-sounds, grammars, intonations, accents, and so on, patently impress us with the sheer irreducible otherness that divides them, rather than with the occasional resemblances that momentarily bring them together. Even if the meaning is carried across, these patent differences indicate how much is left untranslated and untranslatable. Czerniawski (1994) goes even far by saying that the silent majority may prefer to ignore the experts and judge the translations as poems in their own right (9).

DISCUSSION

This section answers the question on the way the semantics and syntax interact in the translation of the poem "Ewe Bibi Mwenye Enzi" by Seif Salum. It also describes the application of both formal and dynamic equivalence to meet the communicative need on the part of the target audience and finally it discusses the fluency and authenticity of the translator.

Semantics and Syntax

In the discussion about semantics and syntax of this translation, we first have to bear in our minds that English and Swahili languages' native speakers differ in their cultures. The two languages also differ in structures. This gives us an interesting challenge in the translation of our poem since the translator has to make decisions on whether to adhere to the semantic equivalence of the ST at the expense of syntactic equivalence or vice versa.

Semantics

Quoting Edward Sapir, Scott (1997: 45) acclaims that "every language has its unique history, therefore, its unique structure" and that the worlds in which

different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. Since every language has its own way of describing the world, then every person has different ways of viewing the world so far as they are speakers of different languages. Choice of some words by the translator proves this claim. For example, the original title of our poem can, in formal translation, be stated as "You Royal Lady", but having in mind that in the English-speaking world, the use of *Royal Lady* would not fit the romantic world but the feudal or more serious context, the translator opted a far distant title that he derived it from the content of the poem itself and not from the title that was used in the original poem which is "Ewe Bibi Mwenye Enzi". So, in this context the choice of title by the translator is more cultural than linguistic. There are also some vocabulary that the translator had to use his instincts in order to make them, culturally fit the target language speakers. For example, in stanza one line one the persona says *Ewe bibi mwenye enzi, salamu zangu pokea* which in formal translation, would sound *You royal lady, receive my greetings*. However, calling a person *you* in English would sound rude, impolite and commanding especially in the context of our poem. So, to find the most suitable word, the translator opted for the term *oh* which sounds more emotional and grief-stricken.

Syntax

Syntax, as far as this discussion is concerned, should be discussed first by beginning with another linguistic level which is morphology. Morphologically, Swahili is agglutinative language. Lock (1996) defines agglutinative language as a language in which words are made up of a linear sequence of distinct morphemes and each component of meaning is represented by its own morpheme. This leads to difference in syntactic construction of

sentences in the two languages since English is less agglutinative. For example, in the second line of the first stanza the persona says *Mbona unanipa kazi, pendo sijalizowea*. Structurally, the morphemes in this example are made up of linear sequence to which one word in Kiswahili will demand several words in its English counterpart. The word *mbona* in English is *why do you*, *wanipa kazi* is *you are giving me a task* and *pendo sijalizoewa* is *I am not used to this love* so the shortest sentence in Kiswahili will sound like *why do you give me the task, I am not used to this love* in English. Knowing these differences, the translator of this poem decided to violate the syntactic similitude of this part of the poem in favour of message preservation. Hence, it comes to sound *Why do you torment me, I'm new to this feeling* which is shorter and preserves the message as well as poeticism of the poem.

Dynamic Equivalence and Formal Equivalence

Equivalence of target text with the source text, according to Hatim and Munday (2004) can be described in two types: formal and dynamic equivalence. They define formal equivalence as structural correspondence which involves the purely *formal* replacement of one word or phrase in the SL by another in the TL. They also define dynamic equivalence as the technique of translation employed by the translator if in the translator's judgment, a form of words that is not sufficiently transparent in the TT is likely to pose a threat to comprehensibility and therefore result in unintended and unmotivated opaqueness. Hence, the translator would need to resort to more *dynamic* forms of equivalence whose effects would not be so much form-bound as content so as to cater for a rich variety of contextual values and effects within texts and which a literal translation would simply compromise.

Formal Equivalence

Formal equivalence is evident on stanza two line one which states *Ulisema wewe wangu*, *Mpaka mwisho wa dunia* and its English equivalence is *You said you would be mine, until the world ended*. This is the only line from the poem which conforms to the formal equivalence. This kind of equivalence was used at less extent because the two languages differ to a large extent syntactically and semantically.

Dynamic equivalence

On the contrary, dynamic equivalence can be observed in all over the poem. For example, stanza three states:

"*Siku tuliyoonana, leo naikumbukia*

Jinsi tulivyopendana, kwangu ukizingatia

Leo mbona twatupana, hukufika nusu njia

Fikiri utanabahi, pendo lipi ni la kweli"

In addition, its English equivalence, according to the translator is:

The moment our eyes met, I recall it today

How we loved each other, or I did anyway

Why do you discard me, you didn't come halfway

Think it through and you'll see, this love is the true love

Nevertheless, if the translator had to use a direct or formal equivalence this stanza would sound as:

The day that we saw each other, I remember it today

How we loved each other, especially my side considered

Today why are you forgetting me, you didn't go half way

Think and realize, which is true love

So, in the translation of the whole of this stanza the translator applied dynamic equivalence. For example, the first line which in the original text says *Siku tuliyoonana, leo naikumbukia* in formal translation had to sound *The day that we saw each other, I remember it today* but the translator used *The moment our eyes met, I recall it today*. In real sense there is no word *eyes* in the original text. But the translator made an adjustment to make the line suit to the English-speaking world by making the persona sound romantic in the English speakers' ears.

Fluency and Authenticity

Talking about fluency, Basil and Hatim (2004) argue that obviously fluency gives the translator ability to do indirect translations, which are intended to survive on their own, and involve whatever changes the translator deems necessary to maximize relevance for a new audience. The decision in such cases has invariably been in favour of a more communicative goal. In his journal article entitled *Translating Rhythm*, Scott (1997) argues that the translator must use the medium which most permits his own authenticity, and multidimensionality of the contemporary mind, to express them. In the process of translation, form and content must necessarily come apart from each other because the source text poet could think his content into a form already chosen, for the target text poet the content is now the given, the pre-existent, so he must use his fluency of the two languages to ensure that authenticity of ST is adhered to the TT. The question of fluency and authenticity can be observed from the translation of our poem where in many cases the translator had to compromise some equivalence in form in favour to communicative goals of the original poem. For example, in stanza four the persona laments:

Niko mbele ya kaumu, haya zimeniingia

Moyo unanilaumu, pendo lako kuridhia

Mpenzi sijafahamu, nini umekusudia

Fikiri utanabahi, pendo lipi ni la kweli

The formal translation of this stanza ought to be:

I am in front of people, shame has enveloped me

My heart blames me, your love to fulfil;

My love I didn't understand, what it is that you meant

Think and realize, which is true love

Nevertheless, the final translation opted by the translator is:

A crowd has assembled, shyness envelops me

But my heart accuses, insists our love must be

What is it that you meant, darling I still can't see

Think it through and you'll see, this love is the true love

Both versions of translation try to mirror the message of the original poem, but the first version tried to balance both form and content hence formal translation. Nevertheless, again opting for formal translation has risked, to a large extent the extent of contextual equivalence of the two texts. In this sense, the translator again decided to favour the message equivalence at the expense of the form. For example, in the first line of the stanza *Niko mbele ya kaumu...* formally the word *niko* means *I am*, *mbele* means *in front of* and *kaumu* means *crowd of people*, hence it had to sound *I am in front of people...*, but the translator decided to violate it by saying *A crowd has assembled...*. Though it still mirrors the fact that there is a large number, the two versions differ where the second

version is in a more dynamic sense than the first one but still the authenticity of the ST can be traced in the dynamic version of this translation.

CONCLUSION

Translation is not an easy task, but translation of poetry is an even difficult task. In the extremity of the discussion on the difficulty of the translation of poetry, some authors such as Adam Czerniawski, Basil Hatim and Jeremy Munday argue that poetry is untranslatable. However, in this world of interactions of cultures we cannot abstain from doing translation of any works of art regardless of the difficulties. In this discussion, Hollander (1945) accepts that it is difficult, but he insists that what is crucial is that the original should be recognizable in the copy. A resemblance may exist even in a pencil drawing which by definition reproduces the colour of the sitter's eyes.

This difficulty has also been reflected in our discussion of this poem where the translator had to favour some features at the expense of others. In this analysis, to a greater extent the translator had to violate formal equivalence in favour of the authenticity of the message. For example, in translating the title of the poem the translator had to sacrifice the form of it in order to make it understandable but also make sense in the ears of English language speakers, hence instead of stating "You Royal Lady" the translators opted for "This Love" for the Kiswahili title "Ewe Bibi Mwenye Enzi". So, this paper has tried to analyse the balanced and interplay of semantic, syntax, equivalence, fluency, and authenticity of the translators of this poem.

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