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ARTICLE

Syntactic translation and semantic implications: The case of Fulfulde and English

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Umaru Kalgo Kiro and Mary Ngozi Nwodo

Full Length Research Paper

Syntactic translation and semantic implications: The case of Fulfulde and English

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It has been a general consensus that translation is an exercise of transferring a message, initially written or spoken in one language, into another language for the benefit of those who do not understand the initial language. The researchers provided some definitions of language since translation is also a language based exercise. It is also to be noted that translation can be based on variety of areas such as literary translation, textual translation, and it can also be based on a linguistic form. In this paper, the researchers are interested in the syntactic aspect of translation in order to determine whether the change in syntactic form from L1 to L2 could imply any change in meaning in the target language and to what level fidelity in translation could be talked of. For the sake of this paper, the researchers have selected, at random, a text, just a short paragraph, from a write-up about the life of the biblical Daniel. The researchers have the translation of the paragraph into Fulfulde and this constitutes the corpus of our syntactic analysis. The researchers mainly concentrated on the verb and the sentence transformation into the target language which, in this case, is Fulfulde. As a result, the research has discovered that even when the message could adequately be transferred into the target text, the structure of the sentence and some language elements change their grammatical class. Thus, the researchers conclude that in the process of translating a sentence, some segments and sub-segments find it difficult to correspond, and that implies the introduction, subtraction or mutation of words in order to maintain the initial message.

Key words: Syntactic, translation, semantic, implications, Fulfulde, French, English.

INTRODUCTION

Translation is generally accepted as an exercise of transferring a message, initially written or spoken in one language, into another language for the benefit of those who do not understand the initial language of the production. It is also to be noted that translation could be based on areas such as literary translation, textual translation, and it can also be based on a linguistic form.

In this paper we are interested in the syntactic aspect of the translation in order to determine whether the change in syntactic form from L1 to L2 could imply any change in meaning in the target language and to what level fidelity in translation could be talked of.

For the sake of this paper, we have selected, at random, a text, just a short paragraph, from a write-up about

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the life of biblical Daniel. Daniel happened to be one of the captives from Judah to Babylon, and one of the selected young men to be trained in order to serve in the administration of Nebuchadnezzar, the then king of Babylon. The write-up from which we selected the paragraph is titled *The power of destiny* by Ben A. Musa (2011). Ben A. Musa is a pastor of one of the vibrant churches in Sokoto and a student of ECWA Theological Seminary, Jos. As a pastor, he believes that God, who created everything and monitors everything, determines the course of any human individuals' life on earth. It is from this perspective he wrote on the power of destiny and to support his view points, he chose some biblical heroes of faith, which is prophet Daniel.

Our objective here is not to analyze or debate on the power of destiny. We rather intend, by translating this paragraph, to examine the grammatical elements that intervene in the translation, the losses and the additions that occur in the process of translation and especially the question of fidelity in translation. We, however, need to stress here that the question of fidelity in translation constitutes a crucial dilemma, not only for the translators but also for anybody writing in a foreign language. To substantiate this reality, Raja Rao, cited by Jummai (2013:2) from the work of Jean Sévry affirms that: "The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is not one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language."

WHAT IS TRANSLATION

Translation, as most of fields of knowledge, is subjected to a variety of definitions, and this is just natural since no two individuals are hundred percent alike, both in physical and in mind. However, we will attempt to define translation as an exercise of converting a statement from language A into language B for the sake of establishing communication between the speakers of language A and those of language B. It is in this context that Microsoft® Encarta® 2009 defines translation as "a word, phrase, or text in another language that has a meaning equivalent to that of the original; rendering of something written or spoken in one language in words of a different language." Therefore, one can say, without risk, that translation is the expression of an idea or a message in a language other than the original language in which that message is generated without distorting this message from its original intention. It is deducible here that translation is nothing more or less than a link between two communities that do not speak the same language. This is in line with the opinion of Bandia (2014: 11-12), a Professor of Translation Studies and postcolonialism, when he says that:

... translation has as an objective the effacement of differences in an act of linguistic homogenization. Yet, in practice the act of translation results in simultaneously maintaining and resolving these differences by transforming one language into another and enabling monolingual readers to grasp the text in their own language while remaining decidedly monolingual. In other words, as a mediation process, translation does not resolve difference but maintains it, thereby justifying its own existence and necessity.

It may be important to note here that translation, even though having as objective *the effacement of differences*, cannot actually erase the differences that make the languages involved *two languages*. The role of translation would therefore remain the linguistic bridge linking language A to language B. This argument, though not underscoring the question of fidelity in translation, emphasizes the essential in translation which is creating information for the other. It is in this perspective that Kiro (2014) wrote an article titled *Translation as a means of creating information* and presented in an International Conference on Translation in Lusaka, Zambia. This point can also be perceived even in the arguments of those advocating for the fidelity in translation as in the words of Cuq Jean-Pierre (2003:239) emphasizing the importance of fidelity in the practice of translation: "...en effet, la traduction nécessite en premier lieu la transmission de l'information initiale au destinataire de l'énoncé, mais elle doit aussi essayer de produire sur lui les mêmes effets que sur l'interlocuteur de la langue source."

Meaning: Consequently, translation necessitates firstly the transmission of initial information to the target of the statement, but the information must also reproduce the same effects on the target as on the speaker of the L1.

Considering that one cannot talk of translation without implicating languages, we are compelled here to explore definitions of language before discussing what the concept of translation is all about. Being that the concept of language is not a new concept of study in the humanities, it is not ours to invent any new definition, but to refer to definitions already provided by academicians and researchers, of international reputation, in this field of knowledge. Due to the varieties of field of knowledge and also the varieties of orientation and world view, anybody who wants to get the definition of language will be confronted with a multitude of definitions; therefore, we are not going to venture into an exhaustive collection of definitions of language. In fact, Pushpinder and Jindal (2001: 3), in trying to find answer to *What is language*, argued that "...the term language can be understood better in terms of its properties or characteristics." that "Some linguists, however, have been trying to define language in their own ways even though all these definitions have been far from satisfactory".

However, we will select few of them just to have a basis on which we will base our discussion. Robins (1985) cited by Pushpinder and Jindal (2001:3) gives the following definition that: "Language is a symbol system based on pure or arbitrary conventions... infinitely extendable and modifiable according to the changing needs and conditions of the speakers." According to Sapir (1921), equally cited by Pushpinder and Jindal (2001: 4), "Language is a purely human and non intuitive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of system of voluntarily produced symbols." And we conclude this list with the definition provided by *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, again quoted by Syal and Jindal (2001: 5) that says: "Language is a system of conventional spoken or written symbols of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture communicate."

While it is generally and empirically accepted as human means of communication, language remains the most complex means of communication. When we say complex, we are alluding to the idea of system, just as the term becomes the meeting point of the three definitions we have quoted above. What is interesting in the series of these definitions, and of great concern for our discussion, is the concept of a group of speakers. It is to stress the importance of speech that King and Gilbert (1994: 17), award-winning host of CNN's *Larry King Live*, advocates that "Talk is the most essential form of human communication, the one that distinguishes us as a species." It is natural that human beings live in groups and communities, and since the groups are never homogeneous, their means of communication vary as well from one linguistic group to the other. But the necessity to interact between individuals and communities, for economic, political and social reasons, makes it imperative for people to talk, communicate and even exchange ideas. It is this natural social situation that makes the translation and interpretation indispensable practices in the communication and human social interactions. However, our discussion will not extend to interpretation, but it will be limited to the practice of translation.

THE ORIGINAL TEXT

-Daniel's life is '1', a picture of the triumph of faith and destiny but these came '2' out of a strong determination to fulfill God's destiny for his life.

-Although young when deported '3', Daniel remained '4' true to his faith, served '5' as a counselor to two Babylonian Kings and two Medo Persian kings.

-He was '6' a man of prayer and statesman with the gift of prophecy.

-All this happened '7' because he discovers '8' "the path of destiny" called '9' determination.

TRANSLATED TEXT IN FULFULDE

-Jonnde Daniel laatike foto jaalangal nuɗɗinki i hoddiroore, bo ɗu'um fu laatike dow no o tiidɗi yi'ugo maa hoddiroore Allah heewii nder yonki makko.

-Koo nde laatii Daniel no suka nde nyaaraa leydi kordaaku, o darike dow goonga nuɗɗinki makko, ha o laatii cawrinowo Laamiibe Babyla ɗiɗo nden wobbe ɗiɗo be Persiya.

-Daniel laatike nedɗo do'aaje, bo arɗo mo kokkal annabaaku.

-Nihi fu laatike gam Daniel yiitii "laawol hoddiroore" wataw adanki bernde.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Number of words

Naturally some languages use more words than others to express the same idea. This is highly noticeable even in translation, and it could be in whatever form of translation is so used. We are not sure whether English needs more words to express the same idea than Fulfulde does; but in this corpus there are *seventy-seven (77) words* for the original text in English but *seventy-one (71) words* in Fulfulde translated text.

Verbs and verbal tenses

As for the verbal intervention in this corpus, there are nine actualized verbs in the original text in the English language and they are: is, came, deported, remained, served, was, happened, discovers and called). Among these nine verbs, two are in their past participle form and are here employed as adjectives. They are deported and called. However, we will note here that in the Fulfulde text the first past participle (deported) has been actualized because Fulfulde language does not accept that very structure. The second past participle (called) is entirely replaced by a conjunction (wataw) which is equal to (that means). However, even with this development, the Fulfulde text has eleven) conjugated verbs as follows: laatike, laatike, tiidɗi, heewii, laatii, nyaaraa, darike, laatii, laatike, laatike, yiitii, as against nine in English.

Before we discuss the tenses of the verbs in the two texts, it is important to talk here about the mutation of some active verbs, in English, to passive verbs in Fulfulde. They are: verb 2 "came" that turned to *laatike*; verb 5 "served as" that turned to *laatii*; and verb 7 "happened" that turned to *laatike*. Consequently, we can see that in the English there are only two being verbs out of the total of nine: is, was; while in the Fulfulde text there are six (6) being verbs out of eleven: *laatike*, *laatike*, *laatii*, *laatii*, *laatike*, *laatike*.

*Another grammatical aspect to be considered here is the verbal behavior in the process of translation from English text to Fulfulde text. In the English text, verbs **1(is)** and **8 (discovers)** are in present tense and the rest are in past tense. But in the Fulfulde text all the verbs are in either general past tense (laatike, heewii, laatii, darike, yiitii) or relative past tense (tiidí, nyaaraa).

In the case of English text, it could be explained that the author used the past tense narrative techniques and the first present tense “is” occur with the habitual present value. But as for the second present tense “discovers” we would prefer “has discovered” than the present form since it cannot take habitual value of the present tense. As for the Fulfulde verbal behavior in this text, the two past tenses reflect the nature of the narration which is a past period compared to the time of writing. However, we could add that Fulfulde language views an action in either completed, in this case it is expressed in past, or uncompleted, and in this case is expressed in future tense.

This could explain why the English verbs 1 “is” and 8 “discovers” are translated into Fulfulde general past tense, considering that the two processes of being a picture and that of discovering have already been completed.

Equivalence between segments of sentences

In this paragraph, we will segment the sentences and compare the segments obtained of the two languages in order to identify their syntactic similarities and dissimilarities. The segmentation is as follows:

1st -Sentence 1st Segment:

-Daniel’s life is a picture of the triumph of faith and destiny
(Jonnde Daniel laatike foto jaalangal nuddíinki i hoddiroore,)

In this segment the correspondence between the two languages has no problem, except where life is translated as “living” (jonnde), but that is the right equivalent of life in this context.

1st -Sentence 2nd Segment

-but these came out of a strong determination to fulfill God’s destiny for his life. (Amman dú’um fu laatike dow no o tiidí yi’ugo maa hoddiroore Allah heewii nder yonki makko.)

In this second segment, came is translated as “has been” (laatike), since that very expression may not be in Fulfulde, out of is translated as “based on” (dow), while strong determination is translated as “how much he dedicated” (no o tiidii...). to fulfill God’s destiny for his life is translated as “to see that (until) God’s destiny is

complete in his life” (yi’ugo maa hoddiroore Allah heewii nder jonnde makko). The observation to be made here is that words must change nature or function in the L2 in order to provide the right equivalence of L1. We can also observe the infiltration of preposition maa (until) which intervene to express the idea of perseverance and tenacity of Daniel to make sure that what God has destined to happen in his life is fulfilled in him even in the land of slavery.

2nd - Sentence 1st Segment

– Although young when deported,
(Koo nde laatii Daniel no suka nde nyaaraa leydi kordaaku,)

The first segment of the 2nd sentence is a nonverbal phrase, but the translation into Fulfulde imposes a verb (laatike) and “**land of slavery**” (leydi kordaaku). It has also imposed that Daniel appear in this very segment instead of the next one to avoid ambiguity.

2nd -Sentence 2nd Segment

-Daniel remained true to his faith,
(o darike dow goonga nuddíinki makko),

In this segment, except Daniel that is replaced by the pronoun “**he**” (o) in Fulfulde translation, there is no problem of equivalence between the **L1** and the **L2**.

2nd -Sentence 3rd Segment

-Served as a counselor to two Baylonian Kings and two Medo Persian kings.
(- ha o laatii cawrinowo Laamiibe Babyla dído nden wobbe dído be Persiya.)

In this third segment of the second sentence, the expression “served as” is translated into Fulfulde as “has even been” (ha o laatike) to express an idea of degree of Daniel’s progress and development in the land of slavery. The expression and two Medo Persian Kings is translated as “then (nden) two others of Persia”. Medo is eliminated and kings is replaced by a possessive pronoun (be).

3rd -Sentence 1st Segment

-He was a man of prayer
(-Daniel laatike neddo do’aaje,)

In this segment, except the word prayer that is translated into Fulfulde as “prayers” (do’aaje) in plural form, there is no problem of correspondence between the two languages involved in the translation.

3rd -Sentence 2nd Segment

-and statesman with the gift of prophecy.
(kuma ardiido mo kokkal annabaaku.)

In the second segment of the third sentence, statesman is translated as “leader” (ardo) since that very title, as

conceived in English culture and administration has no adequate correspondence in Fulfulde.

4th Sentence 1st Segment

-All this happened
(-Nihi fu laatike)

In this first segment of the fourth sentence, there is no problem of correspondence between English and Fulfulde.

4th Sentence 2nd Segment

-because he discovers “the path of destiny” called determination.
(-gam Daniel yiitii “laawol hoddiroore” wataw adanki bernde.)

In the same way, the second segment of the fourth sentence has no problem of correspondence between the languages involved in this analysis, except where verb discovers is translated in Fulfulde in the general past tense (yiitii). But we have earlier expressed our preference to the past tense for this verb.

It is of good interest to note that the situation where it is difficult to always have correspondence between two languages involved in translation cut across many languages. This is normal as naturally some languages are richer than others in expressions and terminologies to describe situations and/or to express ideas. It could also be that some languages need more words than others to express the same idea. In their *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais*, Vinay and Darbelnet (2008:125), specialists of translation, give some very practical examples in these two languages, and we want to use these examples as representative samples for other languages:

- Je suis dans l'incertitude quant à ... (I am uncertain as to ...)
- Cela m'a été d'un grand secours: (It has been very helpful.)
- Nous sommes à l'abri du vent : (We are sheltered from the wind)

It is easily observed that French has used more words than English in these three sentences. It is also noticed that in sentences 1 and 2, French used noun while English used adjective. In the third sentence, we could see that the two languages have come a little closer as they all use verb *to be*. But yet when French says “*we are under shelter*”, English says “*we are sheltered*”, and thus one could assume that in a translation exercise, a larger percentage of a text is translated on characterization.

Conclusion

Translation is an interesting language based academic

exercise and usually it involves two languages. It is in this perspective that we engaged in translating this short paragraph from English language to Fulfulde language. We have considered three aspects for the analysis. First of all we number the words that make up the paragraph, both in English and in Fulfulde and we realized that, in this case there are more words in English than in Fulfulde; but we do not take the risk of considering it as a rule. Linguists in Fulfulde will do that. Secondly we looked at the verbs and we observed that when English has nine conjugated verbs, Fulfulde has eleven conjugated verbs for the same paragraph and some active verbs in English turned to passive form in Fulfulde. In the same verbal analysis, all the Fulfulde verbs are in the past tenses even where English uses present tense. However, we explained that this is due to the “genie” of Fulfulde that considers a process as completed or to be completed in future.

The other aspect we considered in this analysis is the equivalence between the sentences and the segments of these sentences as they appear in the two languages of the translation. It is especially at this level that one can talk of fidelity in translation. But as it is a common knowledge to everyone in language business, there are no two languages that are identical in all aspects. Thus we observed that many segments and sub-segments have difficulties to correspond, implying the introduction, subtraction or mutation of words in order to maintain the initial message. In the reality of what we have done as practice of translation on this short paragraph, we wish to conclude by saying that the total fidelity would be the least objective one could achieve in the practice of translation.

However, as pragmatic linguist, we maintain the position of Cuq Jean-Pierre (2003:239) that “...translation necessitates firstly the transmission of initial information to the target of the statement” then any other consideration could follow.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interest.

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The background of the entire page is a composite image. The upper portion features a grey Buddha statue in a meditative pose against a dark, textured background. The lower portion shows a bowl of snacks, including what appears to be a bowl of nuts or seeds, and some breadsticks or crackers scattered around it. The text is overlaid on these images.

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